THE Hudson REVIEW

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The House of Pain

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT:
Words Words Words—a story

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LOUIS SIMPSON

The Runner

This is the story of a soldier of the 101st Airborne Division of the Army of the United States.

The Runner *is fiction; the episodes and characters are imaginary. But the fiction is based on the following history.*

On September 17, 1944, parachute and glider infantry of the First British Airborne Division, the American 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, and a Polish brigade, descended in eastern Holland, at Eindhoven, Grave, Nijmegen and Arnhem. Their object was to make a bridgehead across the Lower Rhine at Arnhem. The British Second Army would join them and advance from Arnhem into the plains of northern Germany.

At Arnhem the British airborne troops were attacked by enemy units in overwhelming strength, and forced back across the river. The more fortunate Americans defended a corridor from Eindhoven to Nijmegen. The fighting, bitter at first, settled into a stalemate, and, with the coming of the rainy season, petered out entirely.

In mid-November the 82nd and 101st were drawn back to Rheims, to re-equip and get the drizzle out of their bones.

On December 17, they were alerted for combat. A German attack was developing in Belgium. The divisions were hurried by truck into the Ardennes, and on the night of December 19, the 101st were digging in around Bastogne.

I am most grateful to Mr. Donald Hall, who encouraged me to begin and to complete this story.

I

"And the condemned man ate a hearty meal,"
The runner said. He took his mess-kit over
To the garbage can. He scraped his mess-kit out,
Then dipped it in the can of soapy water,
And swished it in the can of clean, hot water,
And came back to his place.
The company
Was spread along one edge of the airfield,
Finishing lunch. Those with the appetite

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Were going through the chow-line once again.
They looked all pockets, pockets and baggy pants.
They held their mess-kits out to the sweating cooks,
Who filled them up; then bore their precious load
Apart.
The runner felt in his breast-pocket
For cigarettes. He lit one and inhaled.
Leaning back on his pack, his feet sprawled out,
He stared at the ranks of gliders and tow-planes
And said, "I wonder if . . . "
"Agh!" said a voice,
"Why don't you dry up, Dodd!"
He looked around
And met the eyes of Kass, the radio-man,
Glaring beneath the rim of his steel-helmet.

"What?" said the runner.
"Who needs your remarks?
First, the condemned men eat a hearty meal,
And then you wonder . . . "
"When we're coming back."
"What's it to you?"
The runner didn't answer.
Sometimes it seemed that anything he said
Rubbed someone the wrong way. He'd only meant
He hoped the outfit would come back to England.
He liked the village where they had been quartered,
And London, where he'd gone on two-day passes.
He liked the pubs, the mugs of mild-and-bitter,
And country lanes. Some day, when they came back,
He'd go off on his own. Rent a bicycle.
He'd see some of the country by himself.
And if he got to London . . .
With a roar
An engine started. Other engines followed.
A gale from the propellers swept around him.

"Fall in!" said the First Sergeant.
Dodd got up
And hoisted on his pack.

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"Get a move on!"
That's how it was: you always had to wait,
And then you had to hurry. He closed his belt,
And slung his rifle over his right shoulder.
The section formed.

"Where's Wheeler?" said the sergeant.
And here came Wheeler at a run. "You, Wheeler . . . "
The sergeant followed him with imprecations
As Wheeler ducked in place at Dodd's right hand.
Out of the side of his mouth: "Look what I got,"
Said Wheeler, and he showed in his clenched fist
A bundle of the new invasion money.
"Over in F Company," he whispered.
"The dice was really hot."

"Ten-*hut*! For-*ard*
Arch!" said the sergeant, and they started off
Across the concrete runway. It seemed long.
Dodd's mouth was dry; his legs were weak. At last
They came up to the glider, their box-kite—
High wings and rudder, little wheels that hardly
Lifted it off the ground—a canvas coffin.
Ungainly as a duck, it wouldn't fly
Unless it had to.

Through the open door
Under the wing, they climbed up one by one,
Toppling with their burdens. Found their seats.
And sat in two rows, looking at each other.
Dodd fastened his safety belt and clasped his gun
Between his knees. The Captain entered last.
They waited. The glider trembled in the blast
Of wind from the tow-plane. The pilots entered,
Leaping up lightly, and made their way forward
To the controls.

The runner could see nothing
Beyond the glider's high, transparent nose;
But now, he thought, the tow-plane would be turning
Into the wind. Two men would run the cable
Back from the plane and hook it to the glider.
Then, with a louder blast of the propellers,

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The plane would start to roll.
The glider jerked
Forward, and rolled, creaking, and gathered speed.
The bumping stopped, and with a sudden lightness
They were air-borne. Constricted where he sat,
Dodd prayed to nothing in particular:
Let the rope hold; no current whirl us down
Smashing on concrete.
They were well away.
He stared at the slender pilots in their pinks
And sporty caps and glasses; at their hands
On the half-wheel. His life was in those hands.
He thought of shell-bursts, the green canvas torn,
Men writhing in their belts, the pilots' hands
Fallen from the controls, a sickening drop.
And then he thought of fields with pointed stakes
That would shear through the sides. Of plunging out
Into machinegun fire.

II

"We're almost there,"
The next man said.
The pilots were peering down.
One nodded, and the other raised his hand
And grasped the lever that released the cable,
And pulled it down.
The glider soared, then fell
Slanting away. The wing rose up again.
They glided down on silence and the wind.

The fields were rushing at them, tilted steep.
Dodd braced himself. The glider leveled, lightly
Bumped on the ground, and rolled to a dead stop.

The door was open. They were climbing through.
And now were standing in an open field
Flat as a pancake. Gliders strewed the scene.
Others were skimming down; and still the sky
Was filled with gliders.

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From their lifted bows
The gliders were disgorging jeeps and cannon.
Riflemen formed their files and marched away.
Dodd's section took its place in the company.
The Captain raised his arm; he swept it down,
And they were marching.
On the bright horizon
A windmill stood. The land was crossed with dykes.
It looked like a Dutch painting. To their left
A wood began. They marched in that direction.

The day was hot, and Dodd began to sweat.
Then to his ears came the familiar sound
Of guns, *the battle-roll, continuous.*
Then all his other days were like a dream.
This was reality: the heat, the load
Strapping his shoulders, and the sound of guns.

The war, after Normandy, had seemed remote.
He had been there; his courage had been proved
To his own satisfaction. He had listened
To talk about the fighting, and he'd talked
And lost the sense of truth. He had forgotten
The smell of apples and the fear of death.
Now he remembered. And it seemed unjust
That he should be required to survive
Again. The sound increased. The battleground
Looked ominous. Visions of a huge mistake
Struck at his heart.

III

The company was entering the woods.

"Dodd," said the sergeant, "take this message up
To Lieutenant Farr."
He stepped out of the file
And hastened to the front. The lead platoon
Was walking slowly, with the scouts ahead.

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He gave the message.
"Right," said the lieutenant.
The runner started back. As he went by
Faces stared into his inquiringly.
He seemed possessed of an important secret.

Shots went off behind him. He crouched and swung
Out of the path, and lay in the scrub, face down.
The firing stopped. A voice was calling "Medic!"

Fisher, a sergeant of the third platoon,
Came up the path, bent low. He shook Dodd's shoulder:
"Who's doing all the shooting?"
"*I* don't know,"
Dodd said. The sergeant, with a grim expression,
Stared at him, and went on.
The runner waited.
Why didn't they get it over with!
"Move out!"
He got to his feet. The path filled up with men.
He made his way back, past the sweating faces
Now streaked with dust. He fell in with his section,
Turned round, and traveled up the path again
He'd just traversed.
The files ahead were parting.
The men looked down, as into a precipice.
There was a body lying in the way.
It was Santelli, of the first platoon.
Dodd had just seen him going out in front;
He walked like a dancer, with a short, neat step,
Rifle held crosswise.
He lay huddled up
On his left side; his helmet had rolled off;
His head was seeping blood out in the dirt.

The files ahead were lagging; then they hurried.
"Keep your intervals!" the Captain shouted.
They hated him together.
At the break
They sprawled out of the path, in the underbrush.

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Santelli's death had made them strangely silent.
Their helmets bowed their heads down on their chests.
Under the distant thudding of the guns,
The weight of all their burdens and the sky,
They couldn't speak, or stir themselves, or lift
A cigarette.
Dodd thought about Santelli.
One of the afternoons it seemed forever
All they would do was practice for the war
With marches, tactics and map exercises,
He lay beneath the wall of an English garden,
Sucking a stalk of grass, and watched the clouds,
And far above the clouds, a fleet of bombers
Trailing long plumes of white across the blue.
Close by, Santelli sat, paring his nails
With a pocketknife.
"Hey, runner-boy," he said
In the familiar and sneering tone
That Dodd despised. "What're we doin, hey?
You've been to college, right?" His little eyes
Were sharp with mockery—a little man
Of pocketknives and combs. "You ought to know.
What's it all about?"

IV

A plane flew glittering out of the sun—
A *Thunderbolt*. It swooped and disappeared
Behind a screen of trees. Then a staccato
Sound began. Machineguns. The plane rose
And flew away. They watched it till it vanished.

"On your feet," the sergeant said.
"My aching back!"
Someone said; but the gripe lacked conviction.
They stood and crumbled out their cigarettes,
And rolled the paper into little balls,
As though they'd like to keep the battlefield
Clean as a barracks.

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As Dodd marched, the weight
Sawed at his shoulders: pack and ammunition,
Gas-mask and trench-tool, bayonet, grenades.
He plodded with clenched jaws, his eyes cast down
On the dusty path, the heels moving ahead.
He stayed, it seemed, in a fixed position;
It was the scene that moved.
The path reeled in
Another corpse. It came to him boot-first:
A German soldier on his back, spread-eagle,
A big, fresh-blooded, blond, jack-booted man
In dusty gray. Stepping around the fingers,
Around the bucket helmet, Dodd stared down.
A fly lit on the teeth. He looked away
And to the front, where other attitudes
Of death were waiting. He assumed them all,
One by one, in his imagination,
In order to prevent them.
Small-arms fire
Was crackling through the wood. Platoons spread out
In arrow-shaped formations.
"Dig in!"
He dug.
The shovel sank in sand; he hacked at roots.
Overhead, shells were whispering, and smoke
Came drifting back.
Two planes went whistling over.
Typhoons. They darted searching on the front.
They dived, and from their wings plunged rockets down
In smoking streaks. The ground shook with concussions.
"We're moving out!"
Dodd climbed out of the hole
That he had dug. The company moved in silence
Through the burning wood.

V

Beyond the wood there stretched an open road.
They filed out on it. In a field of hay

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A plane perched on its nose, a *Messerschmidt*,
The black cross glaring.
Houses stood here and there.
In front of one, a mattress had been laid,
And on the mattress, a German officer.
He was puffed up with air like a balloon,
Belly and limbs swelling as if to split
His uniform. The grass was stuck with feathers.

Night was falling; the light had left the fields.
The road approached a village. At the entrance
A German half-track had been blown apart,
Its mustard-yellow metal torn and scorched;
Out of it spilled the crew, burned black as rubber.
The street, as they passed through, was strewn with dead,
A presentation of boot-soles and teeth,
Letters, cigars, the contents of their lives.

The cannonading was more loud, and flashes
Lit the darkening sky. A company
Of paratroopers passed them, coming back
With somber faces.

VI

Night. And the fields were still. The cannonade
Was flickering and grumbling through the sky.
Red flashes lined the clouds. No breath of wind
Was moving. In the holes that they had dug
The tired troops were sleeping on their arms.

"Dodd, get up!"
He struggled out of his bag.
The First Sergeant leaned over: "Take this message
Back to Battalion."
Dodd took the paper,
His helmet and his M-1, and set off,
Still half asleep.
Darkness without a moon

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Surrounded him. He made his lonely way
Over a road that skirted trees and dykes.
The guns were rumbling; shells went fluttering over;
Machinegun tracers sparkled distantly.
A flare popped in the sky and glimmered down;
He waited in the shadow of a tree
Till it went out. And took the road again.

A deepening of black, a looming wall,
Was Battalion C. P. The guard called out:
"Halt! Who's there?"
The runner spoke the password:
"Kansas!" and was admitted by the guard
Into the courtyard. There he gave his message
To a tech-sergeant; sat down on a bench,
And waited, looking at the pulsing sky.

"Runner!"
He answered.
"Take this message back."
That was his job. Now all I need, he thought,
Is one of those Philip Morris uniforms
The bell-boys wear.
The road was long and dark.
And it was weird to be alone in Holland
At midnight on this road. As he went on
He felt he had no weight. The landscape seemed
To have more things to think of than his journey.
These errands gave him little satisfaction.
Some men might think he led the life of Riley,
Safe and warm and dry, around Headquarters.
A man could be a runner all his life
And never be shot at. That's what they thought.
But how about the shelling? He'd been shelled
As much as anyone. And back in France,
At Carentan, he had been shot at—plenty!
It wasn't his fault he never had a chance
To fire back. Now, right here on this road,
He might be killed by accident. But still,
That wouldn't be the same as being brave.

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He had no chance to be thought so, no part
In the society of riflemen.
So, as he went, he reasoned with himself.

VII

Next day the company went up on line
Near Veghel. They were digging round a church,
In the cemetery, and were just knee-deep
When hell broke loose.
The screaming and flat crack
Of eighty-eights.
Air-bursts.
The metal slashed
The trees and ricocheted. Bit in the ground.

The runner on his belly lay contracting
Under the edge of metal. From a tree
A yard away, leaves flew.
A voice cried "Medic!"

His belly and his buttocks clenched each time
A shell came in. And they kept coming in.
He felt a sting between his shoulder blades.
I'm wounded! he thought, with a rush of joy.

"Dodd!" someone called.
He went on hands and knees
Toward the voice.
"Over here," it urged him.
It was his sergeant, with a dozen cases
Of mortar shells.
"Take them up to the mortars,"
The sergeant said. "They're out of ammunition."

He took two cases, one beneath each arm,
And ran off, dodging among the trees and graves.
He found the mortars and came running back
To get another load. The crack and hum

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Of the artillery was all around him.
He felt the sting of the place where he'd been hit.
He knew that he was brave.
On the last trip,
Kneeling above a mortar, as he lowered
The cases gently, one of the mortar crew
Said, "You're a good man, Dodd."
That night he lay
Smiling, without a care, beneath the sky.
He had done all that could be expected.

VIII

October, and the sky was turning gray.
The battle-line had settled. Every night
The bombers flew, going to Germany
At a great height. And back the other way
The V-1's came. The soldiers in their holes
Heard them droning and saw the rhythmic flames
Carrying woe to Antwerp and to England.

They dozed or watched. Then it began to rain,
And always rained. It seemed they were never dry.
Winter was in the air. Paths turned to mud.
By day and night the shells came shrieking in;
They got so they could tell a dying fall
And pay the rest no mind. They lived with mud.
They cooked and ate their rations in the can,
And tried to dry their socks between two rains.
Cold and sullen, under a raincoat roof,
They shivered in their holes.

One moonlit night
Dodd was returning on his way alone.
There was a wind; the haunted shadows stirred,
And rainpools glimmered in the moonlit fields.

There was a field the runner loathed to cross.
A place of horrors. Here, on the first day,
There'd been fierce charges, combats at close range,

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And the dead were mixed as they had fallen.
Here crouched the German soldier with his *schmeisser*
Close to the parachutist in his rage—
Putrid things, never to be forgotten.
The field was swelling, shining with an aura
Of pale corruption.
To avoid it, Dodd
Went by another path he did not know,
Leading, it seemed, back to the company.
But in a while a fearful premonition
Stopped him. In a shadow, cold with dread,
He stood listening. The branches stirred,
And all at once there was a clash of arms,
The sound of footsteps. Stealthily he turned
To slip away.
"*Wer geht da?*"
He ran.
He plunged into the darkness, blind with panic.
A storm of shots erupted at his back.
Brambles tore at his legs. He climbed a bank,
Clawing, and stumbled down the other side.
Then, as he ran, he shouted out the password:
"Ohio!" like a dog drenched with hot water.
His rifle fell. He left it where it was.
"Ohio!" He collided with a branch
And staggered. At his back the storm increased.
Red tracers streaked the air. Across a ditch
He leaped. And ran across the road beyond.
A hole was in his way; he cleared it with
A stride, and the dark figure starting up
Out of the hole. He kept on running, shouting
"Ohio!" A shape standing in the path
Snatched at him; he swerved out of its grasp.
There was a maze of holes. He stumbled, reeled,
And fell. His helmet flew off with a clang.
Feet were approaching. He lay still as death.

"It's Dodd," said a voice.
At last, he looked up
Into the faces of the third platoon.
Fisher. Others. They looked down in wonder.

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IX

The regiment was bivouacked near Rheims
In tents on the bare plain. Wind-driven clouds
Streamed over, and the land in chilly streaks
Heaved like a sea. The wind hummed on the ropes
And whipped the tent flaps.
Dodd, stretched on his cot,
Could see and hear the third platoon at drill.
They turned to the flank and to the flank again;
They marched to the rear.
"Count cadence . . . cadence count!"
"*Hup* . . . two . . . three . . . four!" they answered on the wind.
The sun flashed from the slanting rifle butts.

The corporal shouted: "When I say Ohio,
To the rear march, and double-time like hell!"
There was a burst of laughter, then: "Ohio!
Run!" the corporal said, "*Hup* . . . two . . . three . . . four!
Halt! Now we'll try that movement once again.
When I give the word Ohio, turn around
And double-time as if your name is Dodd.
Make it look good. All right now—forward '*arch*!
Ohio!"
Dodd rolled over on his face.
He saw himself once more before the Captain:
"Screaming the password . . . throwing away your gun. . . .
Keep out of my sight, Dodd. You make me sick."

And then, the jokes, from reveille to sleep:
"That is Ohio, one of the mid-West boys."
Replacements would be sent to see Ohio
To draw their running shoes. "I'm from Cleveland,"
One of them told him. "What part are you from?"

He turned upon his back. Right overhead
His jacket hung, with regimental ribbons,
The bronze star, and his shameful purple heart.
He stared at it. If he could only sleep
The time between, until the sergeant came

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To put him on another hard detail!
That was his punishment: to dig latrines,
Pick cigarette butts up, scrub greasy pots—
Or to do nothing for a live-long day
But think and try to read, in a cold tent.

When the men came in, they would ignore him—
"You going in to town?"
"You said it, man!"
Polishing up their paratrooper boots
Until the toes reflected a lit match;
Blousing the trousers in their boot-tops; brushing
Their jackets; tucking ties between two buttons;
Cocking their caps—
"Let's go!"
He fell asleep,
And dreamed that he was climbing. On the crest
A dummy stood, with stiff, ballooning arms
And painted face, in Prussian uniform.
He reached the arms and swung them. It went "B-r-r-r-m!"
Like a machinegun. "B-r-r-r-m!" the sound came out
The dummy's painted lips and barrel belly.
Then he was walking over a green field.
It was a country he had never seen,
With haystacks, a warm wind, and distant barns.
Shadows were walking with him, and a voice
Spoke with the measure of a travelogue:
"Vingtième Division . . . fifty per cent . . . "
Another voice inquired: "Casualties?"
"No," said the first voice, "all of them are dead."
And it continued: "Douzième Infanterie . . .
Fifty per cent . . . " As the first voice was speaking,
Over the field, as on a movie screen,
Hands were imposed; they held a scarlet cloth
And folded it. "René de Gaumartin,"
The voice continued, "Cardinal of France."
Again the hands were folding a red robe.
"Marcel Gaumartin, Cardinal of France."
And as the voice and the pale hands continued
Their meditative play, Dodd came upon

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A girl in black. She had fair hair and skin,
Plain features, almost ugly, but her eyes
Were large, they shot out tender rays of light.
The voice said, "Mademoiselle de Maintenon."
In his dream, Dodd laughed. *De Maintenon*! She said,
In a voice remote with sadness, "Yes," and smiled,
"I try not to think of them too much."

He woke,
And his heart was light. It was a vision,
He thought. What does it mean? What eyes she had!
That field, with the wind blowing, and the clouds!
And yet, it was absurd. The words were nonsense.

He went out of his tent.
The third platoon
Were sitting down, taking a smoking break.
"Ohio!" someone shouted. "Where you running?"
He walked the other way, toward a rise
With trees, the only trees in all the plain,
Leaving the tents behind.
He climbed the slope
And sat beneath a tree. On the horizon
Rheims, with the cathedral, like a ship
Traveled the plain. Clouds were streaming over
The spire; their swift shadows ran like waves.
He lit a cigarette. Then, near at hand,
He saw the earth was trenched. A long depression,
No more than a foot deep, with rotten posts
And scraps of wire, wound across the slope.
He stood, and walked along it. The earth gave
Under his boots. He picked up a small scrap
Of wire, and it crumbled. He surmised
This was a trench dug in the first Great War.
Who knew? Perhaps an older war than that.
He faced the East, to Germany and Russia.
Shadows were standing with him. It was cold.
They watched, wrapped in old overcoats, forgotten.
They stamped their feet. The whole world was deserted
Except for them; there was nobody left.

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On the imagined parapet, a cross
Howled in the wind; and there were photographs
Of girls and children; bunches of cut flowers.
Then, on the pitted, gaunt escarp, the night,
The melancholy night, swept with grandeur.
Far in the dark, star-shells were blossoming.
They stamped their feet. It was too cold. Too much
To expect of them. Their boots sank in the mud.
Their veins seemed ice; their jaws creaked with the cold.
They spoke; their words were carried on the wind,
Mingled, and lost.
But now, an actual sound
Arrived distinctly. When he turned to look,
The camp was stirring; men ran to and fro.
He saw the third platoon halt in their drill,
Fall out, and run toward their tents. He moved;
He ground his cigarette out underfoot,
And hastened down the slope.
"Where have you been?"
Said the First Sergeant.
"I've been for a walk.
What's going on?"
"Full field. Ready to move
In half an hour."
Dodd's tent was in confusion.
The men were cramming rations in their packs,
Rolling their sleeping bags, cleaning their weapons.
He labored with stiff fingers.
Trucks drew up
Outside.
"Get a move on!" a corporal shouted.
Dodd hitched on his pack.
The company
Fell in and shuffled, straightening their ranks,
Eyes to the right.
"Let's go!"
Dodd took his place
In the line of olive-drab, the overcoats,
Helmets, packs, the gloved hands holding weapons.
The roll was called; he answered to his name.

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They marched up to the trucks.
"Mount up!"
He climbed
Into the truck, and was packed in. The gate
Clanged shut behind him.

X

Day turned to dusk; the truck went jolting on;
The wind was drumming on the canvas hood
And prying coldly down the runner's back.
Dusk turned to evening, and the trucks behind
Were hidden. He dozed off. Monotony
Had numbed his senses like an anesthetic.
When the gears shifted he would nearly wake.
Sometimes the truck would stop for no clear reason,
And faces, blinking in their woolen caps,
Lifted and muttered; someone tried to stretch,
And this set off a ripple of complaints.
Then the truck moved again.
Once they dismounted,
And Dodd saw that the road wound through a forest.
There was a hill on one side; on the other,
The trees descended into a ravine.
Against that bank, a group of people stood:
Women and children dressed in country black,
With kerchiefs round their heads, and an old man
Close by a cart. The cart was piled with things:
A mattress, pots and pans. They stood in silence
Watching the soldiers. Then the trucks re-loaded,
And the onlookers vanished.
They were driving
More slowly now. The men were all awake.
Another stop. Again the tail-gate opened,
And they dismounted.
This, then, was the place.
Colliding in the dark, they formed platoons,
And marched away.
A signpost read *Bastogne*.

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They marched through a dark village with locked doors,
And were led off the road, into the woods.
The path was very dark, the march confused,
With frequent halts.
They halted in one place
Endlessly; they reclined, propped on their packs.
His helmet dragged Dodd's head back on his neck;
His feet got cold; under his woolen shirt
The sweat was trickling, then began to chill.

Then they were roused, pressed on without a pause,
Till, on a ridge commanding a black slope,
They halted. And the order came: "Dig in!"

Dodd unhitched his pack, laid it on the ground,
And leaned his rifle on it. From his belt
He took his trench-tool out, and opened it.
He stuck the shovel blade into the ground
And levered it. He'd barely circumscribed
A foxhole, when a cold chill touched his cheek—
Snow!
That's all we needed, the runner said
To the malignant sky.
From branch to branch
Snow glimmered down and speckled the dim ground.
Dodd dragged a fallen branch across his hole
And made a roof.
"Pack up," the sergeant said.
"We're moving out."
God help them, they were led
By officers and morons, who had orders
For wearing leather out and breaking spades,
To give employment to the men at home
Who, on this freezing night, were warm in bed
With soldiers' wives!
Having said so, they walked
On in the stumbling dark, till once again
They halted, in a place just like the first.

"Dig in!"

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And it was useless, but they dug
With the energy of a supreme contempt
Marvellous holes—each clammy wedge of earth
An accusation flung in heaven's face.

Then, like a sound engendered by their mood,
An angry muttering rose on the night.
It faded, and again came to their ears—
the sound of guns.
At last, Dodd's hole was finished.
He lowered himself, rolled out his sleeping bag,
And pushed into it. Flickerings of light
Twitched overhead; the guns were coming closer.
Here, it was still. The snow came drifting down.

"Dodd, you're on guard."
He climbed out of his hole.
"There, by the trees."
He walked across the snow,
And as he went he looked around, astonished—
The sky was lit with spots of burning red
In a great circle.
As he stood on guard,
Surveying the black slope, the distant fires,
A man approached. Dodd challenged him. He spoke
The password, and came slogging through the trees.
A runner from Battalion. Brushing snow
Out of his neck, he asked for the C. P.
Dodd pointed: "Over there. Close to the barn.
What's happening now?"
"We're up a creek, that's what!
They're coming—panzers from the Russian front,
Under Von Runstedt. Panzers and S.S.
I was just talking to a man who said
The line at St. Vith has been overrun
By tanks. It was a total massacre.
They're dropping paratroopers too," he said,
And turned away. He paused again to add:
"Everyone else is pulling out but us,"
And trudged away, leaving Dodd to his thoughts.

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XI

The night was long. And day seemed less to rise
Than darkness to withdraw. Dodd, in his hole,
Could hear the fire of small arms, that seems
More threatening to the solitary man
Than does artillery.
One hole away
A helmet like a turtle shell was stirring.
A puffy face with whiskers turned around;
It was the mailman, Lopez. He arranged
Twigs on the snow. On these, his drinking mug.
He struck a match, applied it to the twigs,
And nursed the flame with cupped hands, bending over.

Under the hanging sky, congealed with clouds,
Fog trailed and clung to the earth; and the Ardennes,
The spectral firs, their branches cloaked with snow,
Stood stark against the foggy atmosphere.

Dodd stamped his feet. He stooped, and from his pack
Took a K-ration box. He tore it open,
Shook out the can of egg, the pack of biscuits,
The packet of coffee. He removed a glove
And with that hand put snow into his mug.
Poured coffee in, and mixed it with his spoon.
He scooped a hollow in the snow, and piled
Some twigs in it, and strips of the ration box.
And then put the mug on, and lit the pile.

Voices came floating up—loud gutturals;
A whine and clanking of machinery.
He picked his gun up.
At the foot of the slope
The trees were shaking, parting. There emerged
A cannon barrel with a muzzle-brake.
It slid out like a snake's head, slowly swinging.
It paused. A flash of light came from its head;
A thunder-clap exploded to Dodd's left;
Metal whanged on the slope, a spume of black

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Hung in the air.
Then, endlessly it seemed,
The barrel slid out. With a thrash of branches
A tank appeared. It lurched, seemed to consider,
And then came on, at an appalling rate.
The engine whined; the tracks jingled and squeaked.
And imperceptibly, out of the trees
Stood men, like apparitions of the snow.

And now it was a swarm of walking men
In field-gray and in white, with capes and hoods.

Dodd placed his elbows on the snow, took aim—
There was another thunder-clap. He ducked
And came upright again. To left and right
Rifles were firing. Hastily he pointed
The muzzle at a running, hooded shape,
And pressed the trigger. As in a nightmare
Nothing happened. A bullet cracked by his head.
The safety catch was on. He pressed it forward,
And aimed the gun again, and squeezed the trigger.
The butt kicked in his shoulder, the brass jumped
Into the snow.
The tank was growing large.
The cannon flashed. Machinegun tracers curved
Toward it, and played sparkling on the steel.
Still it came on, glittering in return
From its machineguns. Then, a crashing flame
Struck it, leaving a trail of smoke in air.
The tank shuddered. It slewed broadside around.
Inside the plates, as on an anvil, hammers
Were laboring. It trembled with explosions,
And smoke poured out of it.
The slope was still,
Sprawling with hooded figures—and the rest
Gone back into the trees. Then there began
The sound of the wounded.
Dodd stood up
And looked around. In the next hole, a helmet
Moved cautiously.

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"Lopez," he inquired,
"Are you all right?"
"Jesus!" the mailman said.

With a shaking hand, Dodd felt for cigarettes.
He breathed tobacco deep into his lungs.
On the twigs where he had left it balanced
His mug was hissing and—he held it—warm.

XII

Sometimes the snow came drifting down again.
And when it ceased, eddies and gusts of wind
Would lift it in long skirts that swept across
The dead. It packed into the stiffened folds
Of clothing. When night fell, a freezing wind
Encased the tree-trunks in bright sheaths of ice
And hung bright icicles on every branch,
And clamped the dead in rigid attitudes.

A shell came whistling down. The runner clenched
His fists. It crashed. Another shell came in.
The crashes jarred the ground. Then, from the rear,
A battery replied; shells fluttered back.

"Dodd!"
He unzipped his bag, put on his helmet,
And stood.
"Where are you?"
It was the First Sergeant.
"Here," the runner answered.
"Take this message
Back to Battalion. Are you listening?"
"Yes," he said.
"To Colonel Jesserman.
The Captain says we need a fifty-seven
Or tank destroyer. Tell him that it's urgent.
Now you repeat the message."
Dodd did so.

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He slung his rifle over his right shoulder
And climbed out of his hole.
"Keep out of trouble,"
The sergeant said. "Don't stop for anything."
Dodd started to move off. The sergeant grasped
His arm: "Watch out! They may have got patrols
Between us and Battalion. Good luck!"

Dodd waved his hand, although it was too dark
For the other to see him. And set off
In what seemed to be the right direction.

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NEWTON ARVIN

The House of Pain: Emerson and the Tragic Sense

No one knew better than Emerson that every generation goes through a necessary and proper ritual-slaying of its parents; that Zeus, as he would say, is forever destroying his father Cronos; and that, if the writers of one age reject, with a kind of sacrificial solemnity, the writers who have just preceded them, this is quite as it ought to be—is the Method of Nature herself. "Our life," he said, "is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens." He could not have been surprised, therefore, and probably he would not even have been much disturbed, if his sons, or his son's sons, turned upon him, metaphorically speaking, and put him to the knife on the reeking altar of literary and intellectual change. Certainly this is what happened. Emerson had been the Socrates and even the Zoroaster of the generation of young men and women for whom he first spoke, and to tell the truth, it was not until a third age had arrived that the Imitation of Emerson was followed by his Immolation.

This rite was performed by the literary leaders of the period of the First World War. Almost forty years ago Mr. T. S. Eliot, whose voice was rightly to carry so far, remarked that "the essays of Emerson are already an encumbrance." Three or four years later D. H. Lawrence expressed a somewhat less drastic but in its implications almost equally repudiative view: "I like Emerson's real courage," he said. "I like his wild and genuine belief in the Oversoul and the inrushes he got from it. But it is a museum-interest. Or else it is a taste of the old drug to the old spiritual dope-fiend in me." Emerson, not as a tonic, but as a narcotic—this is the Emerson who came more and more to serve as an image of the man for the new era. The greatest poet of that generation put the

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case against him with almost filial finality. Speaking, in his autobiography, of his friend, the Irish poet AE, William Butler Yeats observed that he sometimes wondered what AE "would have been had he not met in early life the poetry of Emerson and Walt Whitman, writers who have begun to seem superficial," said Yeats, "because they lack the Vision of Evil."

There was much in Emerson's writings, Heaven knows, to account for these rejections; but the ground on which Yeats put *his* was the most serious and the most fundamental—the deficiency in Emerson of what a Spanish writer of that period called famously the Tragic Sense of Life. And indeed it did not have to be left to the age of Eliot and Yeats to express a dissatisfaction with this blindness of Emerson's. There were writers, as there were doubtless readers, of his own time who found him terribly wanting in any true awareness of what one of them called the Power of Blackness. Hawthorne, who was his neighbor in Concord, had a due respect for Emerson as a man; but Emerson the transcendental optimist addressed no word of authority to the ear of Hawthorne—who described him as "Mr. Emerson—the mystic, stretching his hand out of cloudland, in vain search for something real." And Hawthorne's younger contemporary Melville could be even more severe; in the margin of his copy of Emerson's essays, adjoining a particularly cheerful passage in the essay on "Prudence," Melville wrote: "To one who has weathered Cape Horn as a common sailor, what stuff all this is." A much younger man than either Hawthorne or Melville, Henry James, would not have spoken of Mr. Emerson, his father's friend, in just this vein of disrespectful impatience, but he too could not refrain from remarking that there was a side of life as to which Emerson's eyes were thickly bandaged. "He had no great sense of wrong," said James—"a strangely limited one, indeed, for a moralist—no sense of the dark, the foul, the base."

They all mount up—judgments like these, and there are a hundred of them—to what sometimes seems like not only a damaging but a fatal indictment of Emerson as a writer whom we can ever again listen to with the old reverential attention. A writer who lacks the Vision of Evil, who has no great sense of wrong—how can he be read with respect, or perhaps read at all, in a time when we all seem agreed that anguish, inquietude, the experience of guilt, and the knowledge of the Abyss are the essential substance of which admissible literature is made? It is a painful question to

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any reader who cannot suppress his sense of a deep debt to Emerson. But it is a question that must be asked, and one has to confess that, as one turns the pages of his essays, the reasons stare one in the face why Hawthorne and Melville, Eliot and Yeats, should have answered it so negatively.

Certainly it is hard to understand how a writer of even the least seriousness could dispose so jauntily as Emerson sometimes does of the problem of moral evil—genially denying, in fact, or seeming to, that it is a problem at all. Are we really listening to a moralist who expects to be heard respectfully when we find Emerson saying, à propos of young people who are troubled by the problems of original sin, the origin of evil, and the like: "These never presented a practical difficulty to any man,—never darkened across any man's road who did not go out of his way to seek them. These are the soul's mumps and measles and whooping-coughs. . . . A simple mind will not know these enemies"? We rub our eyes as we read, and then open another volume and find the same sage and seer reassuring us even more blandly that "The less we have to do with our sins the better. No man can afford to waste his moments in compunctions."

Did any writer on morals, we are tempted to ask at such moments, ever go farther than this toward inculcating a hard complacency, a shallow self-righteousness, in his readers? The feeling of unreality that rises in us at these times is almost dreamlike, and so it is on at least some of the occasions when Emerson turns his gaze reluctantly to what used to be called natural evil—to the facts of human misery and suffering—to the Tragic. Is it possible to recognize, in the sun-warmed landscape of the Emersonian center, the terribly familiar world of primordial human experience—that world in which sunshine and warmth have alternated, for most men, with bitter cold and darkness? It is easy to get the mistaken impression that, for Emerson, there were indeed no Cape Horns in experience, no jungles, no Arctic nights, no shark-infested seas; only the amiable rustic landscape of the Concord fields and wood-lots. "I could never give much reality to evil and pain," he wrote in his late fifties, and though he had also said quite different things from this, it is true that at the *center* of his mind the space was wholly free from either pain or evil. His thought may be in some sense on the hither side of the tragic; it may be in another sense beyond the tragic; *non*-tragic it undeniably is. He

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himself was quite clear about this. "And yet," he writes in a characteristic poem,

And yet it seemeth not to me
That the high gods love tragedy.

Nor did he love it himself. I am speaking now not of the literary form but of tragedy as an aspect of experience—a subject to which only once in his mature career did Emerson give sustained attention. This was in a short essay he contributed to the *Dial*, an essay called "The Tragic" that was based in part on a lecture he had given a little earlier. It is true that Emerson published this essay in a magazine, but characteristically he never reprinted it, and it was left for his literary executors to include it in a posthumous volume. The theme of this piece is that, after everything has been said that may be said on the topic of human misery, in the end one returns to the knowledge that suffering is a kind of illusion, that it has no absolute or ultimate reality. All sorrow, says Emerson, "is superficial; for the most part fantastic, or in the appearance and not in things. . . For all melancholy, as all passion, belongs to the exterior life. . . . Most suffering is only apparent." And he goes on to speak of the self-operating compensations for suffering in a passage about the horrors of the slave-trade that tempts one, for a moment, to throw his book into the fire, as Whittier is said to have thrown *Leaves of Grass*.

To fix one's attention on passages such as this is to wonder how it is humanly possible for a man to have so weak a memory of his own sorrows or so little compassion for those of other men. Along with this there is that other strain in Emerson that has driven so many readers away from him—the strain in which he seems to be saying that progress, amelioration, an upward movement of things is a law of nature, like gravitation or natural selection, and that the painful human will is very little engaged in it. "Gentlemen," he said to one audience, "there is a sublime and friendly Destiny by which the human race is guided . . . to results affecting masses and ages. Men are narrow and selfish, but the Genius or Destiny is not narrow, but beneficent. . . . Only what is inevitable interests us, and it turns out that love and good are inevitable, and in the course of things." This is the very lotus-dream of progress, you will say, and so is that Emersonian conviction that good ends are always served whether by good men or bad; that rogues and

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savages are as effectual in the process as prophets and saints. "The barbarians who broke up the Roman Empire," he says, "did not arrive a day too soon." This apparently effortless emergence of good from evil, we are told, is a law not only of nature but of history. "Through the years and the centuries," says Emerson, "through evil agents, through toys and atoms, a great and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams."

"Irresistibly," did you say? Did you say that "love and good are *inevitable*"? Are we to understand that the Destiny that guides human history is simply "friendly" and "beneficent"? To the ears of contemporary men there is a mockery of unreality in such language that makes the language of the Arabian Nights seem to ring with the strong accents of realism. In the fearful light of what has happened in history since Emerson said these things—not to speak of what happened before—can one be merely indignant if some thoughtful men have long since settled it that Emerson is not for them? Can one even be wholly surprised if he has sometimes been relegated to the shabby company of faddists and faith-healers, or the equally questionable company of those who have preached the gospel of success, the strenuous life, or the power of positive thinking? The truth is, these charlatans have often drawn, either directly or indirectly, on Emerson himself, and, alas, one can only too easily see why. Let us face it. If Emerson has been coarsened and vulgarized by these people, it is because there are aspects of his thought that have lent themselves to this process. And it is as certain as any human forecast can be that no writer of comparable scope and authority will ever again tell us *in just those tones* that moral evil is negligible and that suffering is a mere illusion.

Yet no one in his senses supposes for a moment that Emerson really belongs in the company of Bruce Barton or Dale Carnegie any more than Plato belongs in the company of Norman Vincent Peale. A powerful instinct tells us that, as he himself remarked of Channing, Emerson is still in some sense our bishop, and that we have not done with him yet. There is no danger of our ever having too many guides or fortifiers, and we know perfectly well that, though we are determined to hold on to Hawthorne and Melville, we cannot afford to dispense with Emerson either. We can afford to dispense with him so little that I suppose most of us are willing now to look at the whole of his work dispassionately and raise for ourselves the question whether his essays are really, after all, a mere

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encumbrance—or drug. If there proves to be more than this to say, we can hardly be losers. And the more critically one looks at his work, the more it becomes clear that there is a good deal more to be said. No great writer is ever rectilinear—is ever unequivocal or free from contradictions—and Emerson, who consciously disbelieved in straight lines and single poles, is at least as resistant to simple formulas as most. Not only so, but, after all, the problem of evil—the tragic question—is hardly a simple one itself, and the truth is that men have given more than one answer to it. It is a matter of elementary critical justice, surely, to try to arrive at a view of Emerson not only in the flat but in depth.

To tell the truth, there is a greater willingness nowadays to work toward such a view than there was thirty or forty years ago.[1] It has become more usual than it once was to recognize that that celebrated optimism of Emerson's was somewhat less the product of good fortune or of a natively happy temper than it was an achievement both of intellectual and emotional discipline. It was a conviction he had arrived at after youthful years during which he had as good reasons as most men—poverty, ill health, bereavement, anxiety—for questioning the absolute rightness of things. No one who has read his early letters and journals can fail to be conscious of the minor strain that runs through them—the strain of sadness, apprehension, and doubtfulness of the goods of existence. The young Emerson can sound strangely like the mature Melville. He was only twenty, and a year or two out of college, when he wrote in his journal: "There *is* a huge and disproportionate abundance of *evil* on earth. Indeed the good that is here is but a little island of light amidst the unbounded ocean." Three or four years after this, forced by his alarming physical weakness, he gave up preaching temporarily and went South in search of recovery. It was a period of dire low spirits and anxiety for him, and one can understand his writing from St. Augustine to his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson: "He has seen but half the Universe who never has been shown the house of Pain. Pleasure and Peace are but indifferent teachers of what it is life to know." One might suppose that this outcry was only the bitter expression of a passing state of physical and emotional misery; but it was more than that. A dozen years had elapsed after his stay in the South when he contributed to the *Dial* the

[1] An admirable example of the more recent approach is Mr. Stephen E. Whicher's volume, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, and one ought also to mention his essay on "Emerson's Tragic Sense" in the *American Scholar* (1953).

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essay on "The Tragic" I have already alluded to. That essay, oddly enough, begins with one of the sentences from the old letter to his aunt; let me quote it again: "He has seen but half the universe who never has been shown the house of Pain." And he goes on at once, in the essay, to say: "As the salt sea covers more than two thirds of the surface of the globe, so sorrow encroaches in man on felicity."

Whatever his theory of suffering may have come to be, Emerson cannot be accused, at least in his earlier years, of having denied to it a kind of reality. On the contrary, there are passages in the sermons he preached as a young minister that remind one much more of the sombre Calvinist homilies of his forebears than of the characteristically hopeful and cheerful Unitarians in whose ranks he was for a time enlisted. A few weeks after he returned from St. Augustine, in 1827, he preached a sermon on the theme of change and mortality that strikes an even Biblical note of sorrow and affliction. "Have we brought in our hands," he asks, like a kind of Unitarian Job—"Have we brought in our hands any safe conduct to show to our ghastly enemies, Pain and Death? Shall we not, my brethren, be sufferers as all our fathers were? Shall we not be sick? Shall we not die?" And a little later in the same sermon he alludes, in a phrase that suggests Hawthorne rather than the familiar Emerson, to "the dark parable of human existence."

It is quite true that these Old Testament accents become less and less characteristic of him as he approaches the maturity of his powers, and that the Emerson of the great middle period—of the famous addresses at Harvard, Dartmouth, and Waterville, and of all the best-known essays—is the Emerson whom we have to think of as the Orpheus of Optimism. But, even in this period, and certainly later, there is another tone, an undertone, in his writings which we should listen to if we wish to sensitize ourselves to the complex harmony of his total thought. That thought, to change the image, is a polarized thought, and if at one pole we find a celebration of the powers of the human will, at the other pole we find an insistence on its limitations—on the forces in nature that are not friendly but hostile and even destructive to human wishes, and on the discrepancy between what a man aspires to do and what nature and circumstance allow him to do. "The word Fate, or Destiny," he says in the essay on Montaigne, "expresses the sense of mankind, in all ages,

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that the laws of the world do not always befriend, but often hurt and crush us. Fate, in the shape of . . . nature, grows over us like grass. . . . What front can we make against these unavoidable, victorious, maleficent forces?"

Are there, then, along with, or running counter to, the "great and beneficent tendency," forces of immense potency in nature which are not amiable but fierce and ruinous? Yes, so Emerson tells us—not only in this essay of the forties but in a lecture he delivered several times in the fifties and at last published as the essay on "Fate" in *The Conduct of Life*. It is an essay that should be read by everyone who imagines that for Emerson there were not really any Cape Horns in experience. "No picture of life," he says, "can have any veracity that does not admit the odious facts." And he lays himself out to suggest what those facts are—the facts of nature's ferocity—with a grim thoroughness that suggests the authors of *Candide* or *Rasselas* or *Moby Dick* much more vividly than the author of "The Over-Soul." Here is all the familiar imagery of naturalistic pessimism—the imagery of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, of plagues and famine, of tooth and claw. "The habit of the snake and spider, the snap of the tiger and other leapers and bloody jumpers, the crackle of the bones of his prey in the coil of the anaconda"—these are all in nature, he insists, and so are "the forms of the shark . . . the jaw of the sea-wolf paved with crushing teeth, the weapons of the grampus, and other warriors hidden in the sea." Could Voltaire or Melville or Zola say more?

Yet the savagery of nature—nature's Darwinism, to call it so—furnishes less of the stuff of the essay on "Fate" than what I spoke of a moment ago, the restrictiveness of nature; the tight limits set about the human will, human aspiration, human effort, by all the forces of heredity and circumstance that Emerson dramatizes by the old word Fate. "The Circumstance is Nature," says he. "Nature is what you may do. There is much you may not. . . The book of Nature is the book of Fate." Within these merely natural and material boundaries men are the creatures of their conditioning. "How shall a man," asks Emerson, "escape from his ancestors, or draw off from his veins the black drop which he drew from his father's or his mother's life?" A demonstration of these painful truths that fascinated Emerson for a time, a few years earlier, had been the new science of statistics—the science that

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seemed to settle it that human behavior can be reduced to mathematical terms and predicted as confidently as the precession of the equinoxes. Perhaps it can, says Emerson, with a quiet smile, in the essay on Swedenborg: "If one man in twenty thousand, or in thirty thousand," he says, "eats shoes or marries his grandmother, then in every twenty thousand or thirty thousand is found one man who eats shoes or marries his grandmother." At any rate, viewed from the outside, as objects, as mere creatures of nature and society, men live and work within lines that are for the most part drawn not by them but for them. We must learn what not to expect.

In short it is not true that Emerson's optimism is quite so unmodulated as it has often been represented as being, or that he was so incapable as Yeats thought him to be of the Vision of Evil. I have been speaking of Evil just now in the sense of suffering and frustration, but even if it is a question of moral evil, of human malignancy, depravity, and vice, it is not true that Emerson averted his gaze from it quite so steadily as his detractors have said. Neither suffering nor wickedness is his primary theme; they are not even secondary; in his work as a whole they are tiny patches of grayness or blackness in a composition that is flooded with light and high color. But, even if we ignore the sermons of his youth, in which the New England sense of guilt and sinfulness sometimes throbs and shoots as painfully as it ever does in Hawthorne—even if we ignore these early writings, it is not true that Emerson's view of human nature was a merely smiling and sanguine one. To be sure, it was the feebleness of men, their incompetence, their imbecility, that he castigated, when he was in this vein, more often than their depravity. But, when he chose, he could express himself as unsentimentally as any moral realist on the brutishness of which men are capable. It was no mere idealist who said, with some humor indeed, in speaking of the Norman Conquest: "Twenty thousand thieves landed at Hastings."

This bluntness is very characteristic of him, and when he was really deeply stirred by the spectacle of systematic cruelty and injustice, as he was during the long anguish of the anti-slavery struggle, he could wrench off certain specious masks and disguises as unsparingly, as realistically, as any of his Calvinist ancestors could have done. Read the "Address" he delivered at Concord on the anniversary of the emancipation of slaves in the West

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Indies if you wish to have a glimpse of Emerson the moral realist. They tell us, he says in his speech, that the slave-holder does not wish to own slaves for the love of owning them, but only because of the material advantages his ownership brings. Experience, however, he goes on to say, does not bear out this comfortable evasion, but shows "the existence, beside the covetousness, of a bitterer element, the love of power, the voluptuousness of holding a human being in his absolute control." Men are capable, says Emerson, of liking to inflict pain, and the slave-holder "has contracted in his indolent and luxurious climate the need of excitement by irritating and tormenting his slave."

It is hard to see how the Vision of Evil, at least for a moment, could be much keener or more terrible than this; and in the whole slavery connection Emerson said a good many things almost equally piercing. But it remains true that his animadversions on human wickedness, like his allusions to human suffering, are closer to the circumference than to the center of Emerson's thought; they give his writings their moral chiaroscuro, but they are not dominant, and I have perhaps dwelt too long on them. His controlling mode of thought, even in his later and more skeptical years, is a certain form of Optimism and *not* a form of the Tragic Sense, and what I should like to say now is that, however we may ourselves feel about this philosophy, it was one that rested not only on a deep personal experience but on a considered theory of Evil, and moreover that this was a theory by no means peculiar to Emerson, or original with him: on the contrary, it had a long and august tradition behind it in Western thought and analogies with the thought not only of Europe but of the East. To put it very briefly, it is the theory that identifies Evil with non-existence, with negation, with the absence of positive Being. In his own writings Emerson expressed this doctrine first in the famous "Address" at the Divinity School at Harvard in 1838, the manifesto of his heterodoxy. "Good is positive," he said to the graduating class that day. "Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real."

Such language as this has become terribly unfamiliar to us, and Heaven knows for what good reasons, in our own guilt-ridden and anxious time; some of us may find it hard to believe that reasonable men ever entertained such a view. The truth is, how-

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ever, that it is not only a philosophical but an essentially religious view, and that its sources, to speak only of the West, are in the Platonic and Neo-Platonic tradition and in Christian theology on the side on which it derives from that tradition. It was from these sources, indeed, that Emerson drew his theoretical Optimism. When Plato identified the Good with absolute reality, and Evil with the imperfectly real or the unreal, he was speaking a language beyond Tragedy; and let us not forget that he proposed to banish tragic poetry from his ideal Republic—to banish it on the ground that the wise and virtuous man will wish to control the emotions of grief and sorrow rather than to stimulate them. As for Plotinus, the greatest of the Neo-Platonists, whom Emerson read with such excitement in the few years before the "Address" at the Divinity School, he too denied that Evil can have a part in real existence, since this—real existence—is by definition good. "If then evil exists," says Plotinus, "there remains for it the sphere of not-being, and it is, as it were, a certain form of not-being." The sentence reads very much like Emerson's own.

At any rate it was this Neo-Platonic denial of any absolute or ultimate reality to Evil that seems to have found its way into Christian orthodoxy in the writings of St. Augustine—"a man," as Emerson says, "of as clear a sight as almost any other." The Manicheans had attributed to Evil a positive and independent existence, and Augustine as a young man had fallen under their spell; but he had broken away from them at the time of his conversion, and steeped as he was in the thought of the Neo-Platonists, he arrived at a theory of Evil that, on one level, seems indistinguishable from theirs. "Evil has no positive nature," he says in *The City of God*; "but the loss of good has received the name 'evil.' " In itself it is purely negative, a diminishment or corruption of the good, for, as he says, "no nature at all is evil, and this is a name for nothing but the want of good." Of course, as one need not say, Augustine does not deny that *sin* has a kind of reality, but he conceives of it as an essentially negative reality—as a rejection or refusal of the Good, not as an ultimate and independent essence in itself.

No sane man, of course, whatever his metaphysics, can refuse to recognize that wrong-doing is in some sense a *fact*; and Emerson was much too clear-sighted a moralist not to find a place in his thought, as Augustine had done, for what his ancestors had called

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"sin," though his account of it is not quite the same as Augustine's. He accounts for it, in a more purely transcendental way, by distinguishing between what is real to the intellect and what is real to the conscience—real, that is, in the conduct of life itself. "Sin, seen from the thought," he says, "is a diminution, or *less*; seen from the conscience or will, it is pravity or *bad*. The intellect names it shade, absence of light, and no essence. The conscience must feel it as essence, essential evil. This it is not; it has an objective existence, but no subjective." Objectively, that is, and when the conscience speaks, the savagery of the slave-holder is real enough; subjectively, and when the voice of the mind is heard, that savagery is seen for the "absence of light," the essential unreality, it is. Despite their differences, Augustine and Emerson are saying at least not dissimilar things.

Convictions such as this, at any rate, are at the heart and core of his philosophic optimism. Both sin and suffering, moral and natural evil, *appear* in experience; but they are indeed appearances, not ultimate realities; what reality they have is relative, external, transitory; absolutely speaking, they are shadows, phenomena, illusions. We may, in our time, find such convictions as these mistaken, but let us recognize them for what they are. They are convictions of an essentially religious sort, and like Plato's, or Plotinus's, or Augustine's, they are in themselves inconsistent with the Tragic Sense. We are in the habit of assuming that the most serious and profound apprehension of reality is the Sense of Tragedy; but it may be that, in assuming this, we ourselves are mistaken. It may be that there are points of view from which the Tragic Sense must be seen as serious and profound indeed, but limited and imperfectly philosophical. It may even be that there can exist a kind of complacency of pessimism, as there is certainly a complacency of optimism; and that many of us in this age are guilty of it. We hug our negations, our doubts, our disbeliefs, to our chests, as if our moral and intellectual dignity depended on them. And indeed it does—so far as the alternative is to remain *this side* of Tragedy, and to shut our ears and eyes to the horrors of experience. Our impatience with Emerson is by no means wholly baseless. We feel, and we have a right to feel, that, if we take his work as a whole, there is a certain distortion in the way it reflects the real world; a certain imbalance and deformation in the way in which the lights and shadows are distributed. The shadows are too meager,

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and sometimes they are too easily conjured away. We have a right to feel that, too much of the time, Emerson is speaking with a lightheartedness that seems to keep him on this side of Tragedy.

What I have been trying to suggest, however, is that we cannot justly leave him there—that the time has come to remind ourselves that it is possible to reach beyond Tragedy, as well as to remain on the hither side of it; that this is what the religious sense has always done; that Tragedy, as a poetic form, has flourished only rarely, in periods of disbelief and denial; and that, for Emerson, disbelief and denial were simply impossible, ultimately, in the light of his transcendental faith. We may well dislike the tone he often takes, but if we wait patiently enough, we shall find him taking other tones; and in the end we must recognize that, whatever our own convictions are, the best of Emerson is on the other side of Tragedy. I have tried to show that he did not simply *find* himself there; if he had got beyond Tragedy, it was because he had *moved* beyond it. "It requires moral courage to grieve," says Kierkegaard; "it requires religious courage to rejoice." We would be less than just, I think, if we denied that Emerson's courage was both moral and religious.

His acquaintance with the religious literature of the world was very wide; it was by no means confined to the Christian or even the Western tradition; and perhaps we might concede that his perspective was wider and deeper than that which most of us can command. While he was still in his thirties he began to read some of the Hindu scriptures as they appeared in translation; and he quickly recognized in them philosophical and religious insights that seemed at times to be mere anticipations of his own. When he read the Upanishads, or the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or the *Vishnu Purana*, what he found in them was a conception of the ultimate and impersonal Ground of Being—of Brahma—that had much in common with the Absolute of the Neo-Platonists and with his own God or Over-Soul. He found more than that. He had already arrived at the conviction that, as he said, "Within and Above are synonyms"; that the Over-Soul and the individual soul are one; that the kingdom of God, as the gospel says, is within you. The Upanishads only confirmed him in this conviction—confirmed him by their expression of the doctrine that the Absolute Self and the individual self are identical; that Brahma and Atman, as they say, are one; that, as they also say, "*That* art *Thou*." This too was a

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doctrine that left the Tragic Sense behind it. According to the Upanishads, the man who, as a result of intense discipline and concentrated meditation, attains to a knowledge of the Self—call it either Brahma or Atman, for they are the same—has transcended the illusory realm of human wretchedness and wickedness, and is beyond either. "He who knows the Self," says the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, "is honored of all men and attains to blessedness. He who meditates upon Brahma as such lacks nothing and is forever happy. He who meditates upon Brahma as such becomes himself invincible and unconquerable. . . . Indeed, the Self, in his true nature, is free from craving, free from evil, free from fear."

When one reads passages like this, and there are many of them, one finds it easy to understand why the literary form of Tragedy—the tragic drama—is unknown in Sanskrit literature. In any case, I do not wish to imply that there are no important differences, even in this connection, among the thinkers I have spoken of; that the Neo-Platonist Plotinus, the orthodox Christian Augustine, and the authors of the Upanishads were perfectly at one in their view of Good and Evil; and that Emerson is indistinguishable from any of them. The differences are vital, some of them, and certainly there is much in Emerson, especially in his tone, that would have struck his great predecessors as very dubious indeed. I have intended only to suggest that it is superficial to rule out the whole of him, once for all, on the ground that he lacked the Vision of Evil; to see him as nothing but a transcendental American optimist of the mid-nineteenth century; to fail to see that his view of these things was in a great philosophic and religious tradition; and that he rejected Tragedy not because he was by temperament wholly incapable of tragic insight but because it seemed to him that, as Karl Jaspers has said, "tragedy is not absolute but belongs in the foreground"; it belongs, as he says, "in the world of sense and time," but not in the realm of transcendence. It belongs, let us say, in the world of appearance, of the relative, of illusion; not in the realm of transcendent reality and truth in which Emerson's faith was complete. And perhaps it is only readers who have a comparable faith, who will now accept him as master and guide; accept him as Dante accepted Vergil: "tu duca, tu segnore, e tu maestro."

Yet this is not quite true either, and I suppose has never been. There seem always to have been readers, there seem to be readers

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still, who have not been able to share Emerson's idealistic religious beliefs, and who nevertheless have found him, in spite of everything, an intellectual and moral stimulant—a cup-bearer, not an anaesthetist. Certainly Baudelaire did not share Emerson's optimism, yet Baudelaire pored over *The Conduct of Life*, and said that Emerson had "a certain flavor of Seneca about him, which effectively stimulates meditation." Certainly André Gide did not share Emerson's transcendentalism, yet Gide describes Emerson's essays as "reading for the morning," and clearly he found in them that *matutina cognitio* or "morning knowledge" which Emerson himself, borrowing a phrase from Thomas Aquinas, had described as the knowledge of God. Certainly Nietzsche did not share Emerson's other-worldliness, yet Emerson was one of his two or three great teachers and models. He is said to have carried copies of the essays, heavily annotated, with him whenever he travelled; and it was precisely Emerson's capacity for joy that Nietzsche seems most to have cherished in him. There is a paragraph in *The Twilight of Idols* in which he compares Emerson with Carlyle, to the disadvantage of the latter: Emerson, says he, "is much more enlightened, much broader, more versatile, and more subtle than Carlyle; but above all, he is happier. . . His mind is always finding reasons for being contented and even thankful." For the author of *Zarathustra* this could only have been a token of Emerson's greatness.

Why is it that men of this sort, so little given to easy solutions and facile reassurances, have again and again found Emerson so bracing? Not, surely, because they have been willing to accept his transcendental theory of Evil, but because that theory, in Emerson as in some other thinkers, proved to be wholly consistent with a moral strenuousness seldom encountered in modern writers one can respect. For the truth is that, in this connection as in others, Emerson is a polarized, a contradictory, writer; and if, at the one extreme, you find the peculiar moral passiveness that contents itself with a "beneficent" and "irresistible" tendency toward the Good, at the other extreme you find the equally if not more characteristic celebration of the active and energetic will. It is what Emerson often calls Power, and in the essay on "Fate" from which I have quoted, after giving the devil his due, and making every concession to the determinists that seems to him possible, he goes on to insist that, among the forces operating in the universe, the

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human will is one—and that, ideally speaking, it counterweighs all the others. "For though Fate is immense," he says, "so is Power, which is the other fact in the dual world, immense. If Fate follows and limits Power, Power attends and antagonizes Fate. We must respect Fate as natural history, but there is more than natural history." This "more" includes the freedom of the human will, and it has to be reckoned with just as seriously as the laws of physics and chemistry; indeed, it is itself a law just as truly as they are, and more truly. "A part of Fate," as he says, "is the freedom of man." And what this should teach us, he goes on to say, is not a fatalistic acceptance, but an exhilarated and courageous activism. " 'Tis weak and vicious people," he says, "who cast the blame on Fate. The right use of Fate is to bring up our conduct to the loftiness of nature. Rude and invincible except by themselves are the elements. So let man be. Let him empty his breast of his windy conceits, and show his lordship by manners and deeds on the scale of nature. Let him hold his purpose as with the tug of gravitation." The true lesson to be learned from the facts of determinism is that we can afford to be brave. " 'Tis the best use of Fate," as he says, "to teach a fatal courage. . . If you believe in Fate to your harm, believe it at least for your good." The one is quite as philosophical as the other.

It would be very unjust, in short, not to recognize the strenuous strain in Emerson's optimism; not to keep reminding ourselves of such injunctions as the one with which he approached the conclusion of his essay on "New England Reformers": "That which befits us, embosomed in beauty and wonder as we are, is cheerfulness and courage, and the endeavor to realize our aspirations." The word "endeavor," like the word "work," is a thematic word in Emerson. And yet I suppose that, even in saying this, we are not quite at the center of the Emersonian vision. I have said that his thought—or better his feeling—moves back and forth between a trusting passiveness and an energetic activism; and for the most part this is true. But there are moments in his work when the dichotomy between the passive and the active is transcended, and what he expresses is a spiritual experience that partakes of both—an experience of such intensity, yet of such calm, that neither of the words, "active" or "passive," quite does justice to it. In recording such moments he expresses most perfectly that joy which, according to Kierkegaard, demands religious courage. One of

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the most eloquent of these passages occurs in the great address on "The Method of Nature" which he read at Waterville College, now Colby, in 1841:

> We ought to celebrate this hour by expressions of manly joy. Not thanks, not prayer seem quite the highest or truest name for our communication with the infinite,—but glad and conspiring reception,—reception that becomes giving in its turn, as the receiver is only the All-Giver in part and in infancy. I cannot,—nor can any man,—speak precisely of things so sublime, but it seems to me the wit of man, his strength, his grace, his tendency, his art, is the grace and the presence of God. It is beyond explanation. When all is said and done, the rapt saint is found the only logician. Not exhortation, not argument becomes our lips, but paeans of joy and praise.

If I had to say where we are most likely to find the quintessential Emerson, I should point to passages like this. Certainly there are other Emersons, and they are not to be made light of; there is the trumpeter of non-conformity; there is the attorney for the American intellectual; there is the New England humorist. But none of these, it seems to me, speaks in quite so special and incomparable tones as the Emerson whom one would like to call, not after all a moralist, nor a prophet, nor even a teacher, but a hymnist or psalmist—one who, at his most characteristic, utters psalms of thanksgiving, or, as he says, "paeans of joy and praise"; whose most intimate mode of expression is always a *Te Deum*. This is the Emerson who is bound to disappoint us if we look in his work for a steady confrontation of Tragedy or a sustained and unswerving gaze at the face of Evil. They are not there, and we shall lose our labor if we look for them. But there is no writer in the world, however comprehensive, in whose work we are not conscious of missing *something* that belongs to experience; and now that critical justice has been done to what is wanting in Emerson, we can surely afford very well to avail ourselves of all that is positively there. What is there, as we have to recognize when we have cleared our minds of the cant of pessimism, is perhaps the fullest and most authentic expression in modern literature of the more-than-tragic emotion of thankfulness. A member of his family tells us that almost his last word was "praise." Unless we have deafened ourselves to any other tones than those of anguish and despair, we should still know how to be inspirited by everything in his writings that this word symbolizes.

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ROBERT LOWELL

Orpheus, Eurydice and Hermes

Adapted from Rilke

That's the strange regalia of souls.
Vibrant
as platinum filaments they went,
like arteries through their darkness. From the holes
of powder beetles, from the otter's bed,
from the oak king judging by the royal oak,
blood, like our own life-blood, sprang.
Otherwise, nothing was red.

The dark was heavier than Caesar's foot.

There were canyons there,
distracted forests, and bridges over air-pockets;
a great gray blind lake
mooned over the background canals
like a bag of winds over the Caucasus.
Through terraced highlands, stocked with cattle and patience,
streaked the single dead road.
It was unwinding like a bandage.

They went on this road, a washed-out ribbon.

First the willowy man in the blue cloak;
he didn't say a thing. He counted his toes.
His step ate up the road,
a yard at a time, without bruising a thistle. His hands fell,
clammy and clenched,
as if they feared the folds of his tunic,
as if they didn't know a thing about the frail lyre,
hooked on his left shoulder,
like roses wrestling an olive tree.
It was as though some one had sawed his intelligence in two.
His outlook worried like a dog in front of him,
now diving ahead, now romping back,

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now yawning on its haunches at an elbow of the road.
What he heard breathed myrrh behind him,
and often it seemed to reach to them,
those two others
on oath to climb behind him to the finish.
Then again there was nothing behind him,
only the back-ring of his heel,
and the currents of air in his blue cloak.
But he said to himself, "In spite of everything, they are there."
He spoke aloud and heard his own voice die.
"They are coming; but if they are two,
how fearfully light their step is!"
Couldn't he turn round? (Yet a single back look
would be the ruin of this work
so near perfection.) And as a matter of fact,
he knew he must see them, those two light ones,
who followed and kept their counsel.

First, the road-god, the messenger-man . . .
the caduceus shadow-bowing in front of him,
eye and eyebrow, arched, archaic,
arrows in his ankle-feathers.
In his left hand he held *her*,

the one so loved that out of a single lyre
more sorrow came than from all women in labor,
so that out of this sorrow came
the fountainhead of the world: hills, valleys,
roads, towns . . . acropolis,
marble quarry, goats and vineyards.
And the sorrow-world circled about her,
just as the sun and stern stars
circle the earth—
a heaven of *angst* ringed by the determined stars . . .
That's how *she* was.

She leant, however, on the god's arm;
her steps were still delicate from her wound,
uncertain, drugged and patient.
She was in herself, as in a higher hope.

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She didn't give the man in front of her a thought,
nor the road climbing to life.
She was in herself. Being dead
fulfilled her beyond fulfillment.
Like an apple full of sugar and darkness,
she was full of her decisive death,
so green she couldn't bite into it.
She was still in her marble maidenhood,
untouchable; her sex had closed house,
like a young flower rebuking the night air.
Her hands were ringing and tingling;
even the light touch of the god
was almost a violation.

A woman?
yet no longer that blond transcendence
so often ornamenting the singer's meters,
nor a hanging garden in his double bed.
She had wearied of being the hero's one possession.

She was as bountiful as uncoiled hair,
poured out like rain,
shared in a hundred pieces like her wedding cake.

She was a root, self-rooted.

And when the god suddenly gripped her,
and said with pain in his voice, "He is looking back at us,"
she didn't get through to the words,
and answered vaguely, "Who?"

Far there, dark against the clear entrance,
stood some one, or rather no one
you'd ever know. He stood and stared
at the one, level, inevitable road,
and he saw the reproachful boy, the god of messengers,
looking around and pushing off again;
his caduceus was like a shotgun on his shoulder.

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The Children

Adapted from the 13th century German of "Der Wilde Alexander"

Years back when we were children
and at the stage of running
in gangs about the meadows—
here to this one, there to that one—
we picked up violets
on lucky days:
there you can now see cattle gadding about.

I still remember hunching
ankle deep in violets,
squabbling over which bunches were fairest.
Our childishness was obvious—
we ran dancing rounds
with our new green wreaths.
So time passes.

Here we ran swilling strawberries
from oak and pine,
over hedges, over turnstyles,
as long as day was burning down.
Then a gardener
rushed from an arbor:
"O. K. now, children, run home."

We came out in spots
those yesterdays, when we stuffed on strawberries;
it was just a childish game to us.
Often we heard
our herdsman
hooing and warning us;
"Children, the woods are alive with snakes."

One of the children, breaking
through the sword grass, grew white

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and shouted, "Children, a snake
ran in there. He got our pony.
She'll never get well.
I wish that snake
would go to hell."

"Well then, get out of the woods!
If you don't hurry away quickly,
I'll tell you what will happen—
if you don't scurry away
from the wood by daylight,
you'll lose yourself;
your pleasure will end in bawling.

Do you know how five virgins
dawdled in the meadows,
till the king slammed his dining room door?
Their shouting and shame were outrageous,
their jailer tore everything off
down to their birthday suits;
they stood like milk cows without any clothes."

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GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Words Words Words

THE WORDS WERE READY: "Our marriage will be a contract of equals freely joined." He had decided upon them two weeks after leaving port, in a rolling sea. Everything else he'd thought about for the past four months, everything of importance to him, had been adornment, explanation, preparation for the delivery of those words. He had not written them to her, for he felt never so stiff as with a pen in his hand; written, that sentence said everything he meant; yet he knew that, uncircumstanced, it would be impotent upon her. And he intended it to bind; he meant her never to forget it so long as they should be married.

Words, as he believed, bind only when delivered with ceremony, and here was his problem. Their love being free from authority, Jane and he were deprived of ceremony; indeed, once when they had talked about two of her friends who were living together, they had agreed that marriage itself was a social convention to be deferred to only for convenience' sake and the sentiments of relatives; they had therefore never talked about getting married. But off the coast of Venezuela outward bound, he had decided to propose to her. He needed, atavistically, a profounder tie than New York lovers were bound by. They would be bound to freedom, that must be absolutely clear, but bound. He had had to invent his own ceremony.

His plan was this. He would phone her at her office as soon as his ship docked; he would have airmailed her a letter from the last port so that she would know which day to expect him; she would be sure to have kept that evening free for him. He would go to her apartment a little after six; they would talk for a while, till the flush of reunion should have subsided; he would take her to the Captain's Table where they would have shrimp cocktail and broiled lobster; then, over coffee and, he hoped, at the same table from which she had first accepted him for her lover, he would say what he had to say. It was a ceremony of sentiment, he knew that, wholly private, devoid of sacrament; but he knew no other way to freight the words of his proposal with the gravity he wanted them to bear.

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No words repeated to a justice of the peace in a courthouse office could bind them more than legally, and an altar would make liars of them. The Captain's Table; shrimp, lobster, and white burgundy; her left hand in his right at the edge of the table, as it had been when she had said "Come make love to me"—he would ask her to wear the same green dress and her Toledo earrings.

The ship arrived on a Tuesday; good, the restaurant would not be crowded. It was berthed in Brooklyn by 9:30 in the morning; he was second only to the first mate in getting to the pay booth. Jane's *Darling, you're here at last* greeted him in the accents of every sailor's dream of welcome; she had been waiting for him; she adored him.

He got to his hotel-rooming house in Greenwich Village by five. His room was made up and his clothes were hanging pressed in the closet. There was his father's invariable card waiting for him: the old man's leg was bothering him again, they'd had the coldest March fifth in thirty years and the gas north of Syracuse had failed for eight hours, thank God nobody died of it, business was about as usual but every year the new cars got harder to work on, come home for a good long stay. And there was another envelope from Syracuse too, in a hand and with a return address he did not recognize, postmarked more than three months earlier.

The letter was a short paragraph, signed "Very sincerely yours, Rosannah," and the salutation read "Dear Mark." Well, good. She'd never called him Mark during the time they'd known one another. He'd sent her a picture postcard from Beirut, where her father had gone to medical school, a neutral greeting which he'd signed Mark and sent in care of her father at his hospital. The May before, waiting for his mate's papers, he'd substituted at The Drumlins for the golf pro, who'd sprained his ankle; Rosannah had taken lessons three afternoons a week for four weeks; in the midst of the last lesson they'd had a Spring half-hour at the sixth hole; she was engaged; he got the impression that she wished she weren't; he did not even kiss her; she said "Goodbye, Mr. Birch," and ran off with her head bent; he'd cried before going to sleep; and thence to sea. "Dear Mark, It was so nice of you to send me that card. It made Daddy quite homesick. I am living away from home now, as you can see by my address. I'm teaching first grade in the poorer section of town and loving it. At least I love my children, every one of them. Our acquaintance (I guess that's what it was) came to an end so fast. I didn't have an opportunity to thank you for every-

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thing. I hope we meet again." Well, well. Such girlish handwriting. He was at least six years older than she and felt six more than that. She'd shown promise of becoming a good golfer. "I hope we meet again." No more engagement. Well. Too late now, kid, you had your chance. He wondered whether she'd let her hair grow as he'd told her she should.

Jane's door opened as he came down the hall, but she was not in sight. The room was dimly lit. "Jane?" He stepped inside. In the fireplace two logs were flickering softly. "Darling," she whispered behind him and pushed the door closed. She held her arms out to him. She was wearing the silk dragon coat he'd sent her from Saigon on his first trip, held by a gold cord at the waist; her feet were bare; she wore no make-up. He tossed the yellow roses he'd brought onto a table and took her in his arms. She had perfumed herself heavily, as she did only when they were about to make love. Even so, he might have had fortitude to resist her, for the moment, as he had planned, were it not for the Scotch and ice already poured and waiting. "Not yet," he said as she reached one to him. "I thought you wouldn't want to," she answered, "but it wouldn't be loverly to make me drink alone, now would it?" "But I wanted to talk" "Of course, darling, we'll talk till dawn if we want to. I don't *have* to go to work tomorrow." What could he do? Good whiskey, four months' abstinence, her perfume, her white shoulder bare where he'd pushed the coat askew, her lips after kissing tumescent between pain and invitation till gradually they closed back to the little smile which meant she was content, her voice of dream-like welcome—what could he want to do? The words would wait. He lost the wish to say them.

"How brown you are, darling. Look how wintry pale I am beside you. Aren't I revolting? Take off your shirt." Well, she was exactly as she had been, as nearly perfect as she could be. The room and the rug, her straight hair helmeted to her head, her somewhat stubbly legs, the just audible chamber music from the record player, all the same. "I have been faithful to you, you third mate you.You'd better make it up to me, good good good." So he was not able to delight her first off with Madagascar as he had planned, nor to learn whether she had been made head of the domestic workers section of the agency as she had hoped; he was not able to do it and could not will it; her dreamy perfection, which had won him in the first place and which at sea he had wanted to crack, englobed him

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now again belly, brain, and members. The ceremonies they performed were those of sailors' dreams.

The *I love you's* with which he bejeweled her lost their luster as the fire burned down.

Also, by nine he was hungry beyond crackers and blue cheese. "Let's go out for dinner." "How thoughtful, darling. I didn't want to cook, even for you, not tonight. Where shall we go?" "The Captain's Table." "Marvelous. You know everything I want. I was there a couple of weeks ago for lunch and had the best oyster stew in the world. It was the best." Instead of entering her game, he said rather gruffly, remembering his plan, "I want shrimp cocktail and lobster. A two-pound lobster. Don't you?" She looked at him with an expression of worry about the eyes, an expression that had always annoyed him; for the concern, which seemed to be for him, turned out to be for herself, anxiety for fear he should attack her, apology for having displeased him, displeasure at his ill-temper. "You have something on your mind, Markie." "Love." "Love on your mind? Now?" She laughed with relief. She had never said she loved him. "You got to wait, sailor boy. Which dress do you want me to wear?" "The green one with the full skirt." "Oh you remember! You're my favorite lover ever." "And those earrings Mike gave you." Mike had been the friend from whom he'd taken Jane.

They sat at the same table all right; she obviously did not remember it; perhaps she did not remember the event either. Perhaps she did not remember that two weeks after they had first become lovers, just before he had sailed on his first voyage, she had told him, in this same room, that she would not go around with other men while he was gone. He must remind her. For so sentimental a ceremony to have any force at all, each step in it must be recognized and savored. He decided to wait till they had finished their lobster before speaking; they were hungry; there was plenty of time; he was not in the right frame of mind. It was so comfortable inside her globe of perfection that only the memory of his resolution and the knowledge that his dissatisfaction was sure to resurrect itself had power to move him on.

Yet even as he began to speak of love he felt the weakness of his words. She was able to treat what he said as mere tenderness, and to preen. He said, intensely because he was angry, "But I mean it," and knew that to say *I mean it* at such a moment meant *I want to mean it*. "I want to marry you," he said, of momentum. "Oh darling,

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so fast?" "We've known each other since last June. You gave up other men for me. You were faithful while I was gone. I think of you all the time. I love you." "Grim grim grim." He had the impulse to smile with her because he loved her mouth, but he repressed it.

"Our marriage would be a contract of equals freely joined." And they were even holding hands in the same way too.

But *will be* had become *would be*; he had forgotten to remind her of what had happened here before; the ceremony lacked even sentiment. He felt hermetically sealed. "No," she said, "you know I am not sure. Marriage must be all thought out. No, darling, not now. Don't you like what we have?" "You know I do." "Then let's don't spoil it by rushing things. It's so wonderful that you're a sailor. I don't think I'll ever get tired of you. The perfect solution!" Solution to love? Very well. He would play her rational, esthetic game of solving love-problems. She had defeated him. Or else, not really wanting to be bound even by free and equal marriage, he had capitulated to her. "Okey, Jane. I just wanted you to know where I stand." "I do, darling, I know so well and I adore you. So. And if you don't keep scaring me like that maybe I'll let myself love you. Huh?" "Okey. Say, who did you come here with anyway a couple of weeks ago?" "Oh, I was afraid you weren't ever going to ask me that. Good boy." She settled down to curry him sleek with jealousy; he relaxed and enjoyed it.

For five days they were, perfectly, lovers. Only when he was alone and quiet—not often—was he discontent. Ceremony in a restaurant—what had he expected? He was disgusted with himself. Yet he could not help reflecting sometimes that even when they were sharing her pillow with the breath of her repose warm against his neck, he said nothing to her that he might not have said in a Village restaurant in the same tone of voice, nor she to him.

On Sunday he left for Syracuse to visit his father, his Baptist father. Jane cried a little when he was about to leave and laughed at herself for crying, and just before he put his hand on the door handle she brusquely ordered him "Good Bye."

Two weeks became two hours; the coast of Venezuela became the shores of the Hudson, and the rolling sea a landscape bleared by the sleet and the train window; words of a marriage proposal became a nostalgia. He supposed their love affair would dream along, artificially stimulated by his absences, without rupture for a

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long time; he should think of it, as Jane did, as a sort of refuge or nocturne, an experience of its own genre, signifying nothing. That is, insignificant. He damned his father for having polluted his childhood with religion; religion's lies he had worked to cleanse his mind of, but its residual sentimentality was harder to purge. He wished he felt emotionally, as well as he admitted intellectually, that Jane was right about their love affair.

The sidewalk and path of his father's house were swept clean. There was smoke from the chimney. When he opened the unlocked front door, the odor of baking ham welcomed him. At his call, his father, beaming and hand outstretched, came from the kitchen in an apron. "Well, son, I'm so glad to see you. It's been lonely without you here." They embraced; Mark's hand avoided with the practice of years the hump on his father's shoulder. "Come in and warm yourself by the fire. I saved some apple logs for this occasion, son. I hope you're good and cold. And hungry. Your letter came yesterday and the first thing I did was go down to the A & P and get a ham, the best that money could buy." Mark said he was grateful, and he was; but also he wished that just once his father would celebrate with something besides ham. The moment this thought irritated him, he was ashamed of it, for he knew that his father worked nine hours a day in the shop and knew how much labor it was for him to cook a big meal. "I called up Calvin and Mona to tell them I wouldn't be out to dinner today. This will make three Sundays in a row I haven't seen them." "I'm sorry, dad." "It's all right, son, Mona's been feeling sort of drug down recently. The winter's been hard on her, no sun for so long. She's not as young as she used to be." The cheeriness which expressed itself on Mr. Birch's face opposed his tendency to look on the worst side of things; the result was neither cheery nor dour, but dry. Mark got the fidgets—the Sunday afternoon fidgets in his first fifteen minutes at home.

He had not had to stay on the ship the night before but had lied to his father about it—lied so that he could arrive on a Sunday afternoon when there could be no question of his father's suggesting however despondently, that he go to church. "Dad," he said, "what was the sermon about today?" Mr. Birch had been Sunday school teacher, deacon, and elder in the same church for twenty-five years, but he would never call a minister by his first name. "Dr. Walker spoke on the text from John, 'And the Word was made

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flesh and dwelt among us.' He threw light in a dark place." Mark could not imagine what Walker, who leaned toward homely stories and bad metaphors, could say about the Word; but Mark cared enough to ask his father to go on; he knew that an evening of watching TV give-aways, gags, and ads yawned before him; he would rather have the Word.

In the beginning was the Word. How did God create the world? He *said* Let there be light and there was light. He *said* Let us make man in our image. When God said Let there be a man who shall redeem all men, that man existed. His name was Jesus. He was the Word of God. Mark sank into a sermon-listening apathy under this; I don't care what you're talking about, I don't understand it, I don't think you do either. But suddenly, in a burst of irritation no doubt at his apathy, his father said, "Jesus said, 'Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word.' " And Mark appreciated abruptly that Jesus' feeling and his father's were the same as his own had been with Jane; each had been cut off by the very words which were meant to bind. For a moment he and his father cast a look of recognition across to one another. But he knew that his father would not rest content with that look. "I'm getting hungry, dad."

It occurred to him at ten next morning, staring out the window at the patches of snow in the shade, that the only person in town he would actively enjoy seeing was Rosannah; she would be teaching till 3:30 or so. Strange, he'd seen her at nine lessons, then once downtown in Grant's, and for the eleventh and last time at the tenth golf lesson; he had touched her only in the ways a golf teacher must touch his pupil, for the grip's sake, for the swing's sake, and embracing her thus formally had not exited him at all; yet he remembered the intensity with which they had talked on the sixth green, just beside it near a bush, not even holding hands. He had seen her, three days before that, at the stationery counter in Grant's intently choosing among address books; on impulse he had stepped up immediately behind her, bent over so that his lips were at her ear, and said "Keep your eye on that ball, Rosannah." Her head toddled in a way that unmistakably meant emotion; he stood straight, and her head for a moment touched his shoulder as she looked up at him; in her eyes there was no questioning about whose voice that had been, nor surprise exactly, but only for that surprised moment an unveiled warmth. He responded instantly.

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Then they dropped their eyes to the address book in her hand. They talked inanities about address books. When she'd paid for the one she picked, she said that his would be the first address to go into her book; it was supposed to be a little joke, but when he did not smile at it her mouth fell; he gave her his address and told her that he would be gone to sea in less than a month, and her mouth ohed in a dismay as pleasing to him as the pressure of her head on his shoulder had been. Then they'd gone to Schrafft's for ice cream and coffee, and he'd told her how dull civil engineers were and how he'd be coming to Syracuse hereafter only to visit. Thinking of this encounter now ten months later, he wondered why he had stolen up behind her in the department store and why, three days later toward the end of her last lesson, he had told her he loved her; for he had not even tried to kiss her, though he knew she returned his feeling in some kind. It occurred to him now that it would be interesting to find out what so tenuous an infatuation could have left behind it, and to compare it to his relationship with Jane, anchored substantially in sex.

He telephoned the Board of Education to find out what school Rosannah was teaching at, and discovered instead that schools were closed for spring vacation. Splendid, he'd have lunch with her. Her name was not in the phone book. Well, he had her address. The unexpected chance excited him to action: he would surprise her. He put on his dark red sports shirt, light grey slacks, and tweed jacket, and walked the couple of miles to her place, swinging his arms in the sunshine.

But the look he surprised onto her face was not of the sort he had had in mind. Her hair was in a bandanna, her jeans were rolled up to her knees, she was wearing a half-buttoned man's shirt with the tails hanging out, her bare feet were grimy. Her wide eyes of astonishment became raised eyebrows of disapproval. "You should have phoned me." "Your name isn't listed in the book." "Anybody who can find out where I live should be clever enough to find my phone number." "But," he was aggrieved, "you put your return address on the letter you wrote me." "Hmph," she said with a flourish of the nose. She had not admitted him into her apartment. "I'm cleaning." "*I* don't care. It's nearly time for lunch." "Lunch? Very well. Come back in one hour. Okey?" "But I don't have anywhere to go!" "Oh yes, you do, sir. Syracuse is full of places for you to go to. Goodbye." And she closed the

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door. He was offended and left with the intention of not returning. Why, she'd given him her address herself and then said he'd cleverly found it! But the voice of her goodbye, slightly angry and yet warm, lingered in his ears; he had forgotten how sensual her voice was and how bright her eyes; she had been inviting him to return even as she was punishing him goodbye. Well, he would go back and see what came of it.

Jane's "Good Bye," her parting word, was resurrected in his memory—abrupt, timed so as to mean "I'm glad to see you go," with a sort of drill sergeant's emphasis, in a voice devoid of affection. He flushed with postponed anger. To be sure, she had warned him that she would hate him every time he left on a trip, that each time he went from her he would be deserting her though she knew better; but that gave her no right to spoil his leavetaking. On the other hand, Rosannah having scolded and punished him, had forgiven him in the very inflections of her reproof.

And having forgiven, she forgot: she greeted him upon his return as though they'd had this date for a week, stood aside as she opened the door for him, shook hands, and excused herself to put on the finishing touches. Her living room was conventionally feminine; there were doilies on the stand, and the pillows on the couch had ruffles; he smiled indulgently. She came out in the same sort of clothes she had worn at the golf course, blue pullover sweater, brown skirt, the same dirty white tennis shoes; but her eyelashes were blackened, her lips and cheeks rouged, and her bangs in front and pony tail behind were flawless. (And she had let her hair grow.) He had, without thinking about it, rather expected her to have fixed lunch for them in her apartment, but she went directly to the coat closet and pulled out a trench coat. She made a small, imperious gesture with her head, and he held her coat for her, delighted by her arrogance. They walked to Meltzer's and ate hot pastrami sandwiches and cole slaw. She told him about her first-graders, and he told her about Madagascar. She did not seem very keen to play golf next day, when he suggested it, but she let him persuade her—"if the weather held." At a slushy crossing he offered her his arm but she did not take it. Nor did she invite him in when they returned to her apartment.

Yet as he walked along the streets home from her place, he understood why he had said to her that he loved her: she was at once desirable and chaste. He was opposed to chastity on prin-

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ciple, but in her he respected it; still it was clear that the yearning he had built up for her he had translated into infatuation; a simple case of frustration and wish-fulfillment. So he laughed her out of his mind for the rest of the afternoon. The phone rang at dinner: a wrong number. "I forgot to mention it to you, son, but a young lady telephoned me one evening some time ago. Maybe it was around Thanksgiving. Anyway it was after the first snow, which was toward the middle of November this winter. What she wanted was your address." "Thanks, dad, she wrote me." "The same one? She had a funny name." "Tavolga? Rosannah Tavolga?" "That sounds right. What is she, a Jewess?" "It's a Russian name. I don't think she's Jewish. I never asked her." So, for the tedious hours till his father went off to bed, she was back in his mind most of the time, her name especially. It occurred to him that he had always remembered her name from the time he'd first met her, whereas he'd had the devil's own time remembering Jane's name. Jane Mercer—an ordinary name. Nevertheless he found it odd that he had taken so long to get the Mercer stuck in his head; well into his second voyage he had been able to write her address on the envelope far more readily than her last name. But Rosannah Tavolga—the words fell together as though they were meant to, like Eleanor of Aquitaine, or Kubla Khan.

"Oh, my lord, you're not the girl I was teaching." "Why do you say that?" "Your drive. You've got it down beautifully." "Thank you, Mr. Birch." "Oh, come off it." "I had to use all my courage to put Mark down when I wrote to you. You had signed your card Mark, so I thought I should. But here on the golf course again, I feel like calling you Mr. Birch." "Is that why you didn't much want to come out with me today?" She nodded. "Are names that important to you, Rosannah?" She nodded again and walked aside while he teed off; then she started ahead of him down the fairway. He caught up with her. "I was thinking last night how I had liked your name the very first time I heard it." "I'm glad somebody likes it." "Don't you?" "Not particularly." "Do you like my name?" She gave him a complicated look. "Fishing, Mark?" She made the second hole in par. "Did you take lessons after I left?" he asked her. "No, I'm just lucky today." "You must have played a lot last summer." "I did. Nearly every day. Hollis liked golf." "Hollis was the fellow you were engaged to?" She nodded. "Hollis," he repeated. "Now there's a name I could do without."

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He decided that at the sixth hole he would remind her of their parting here. He would make a little burlesque of gallantry so that they could laugh together over it, so that she would not feel threatened again. They were both silent at the sixth tee waiting for a party of four middle-aged women to divot their progress up the fairway; the women insisted they play through, so that when they got to the green they were conscious of an admiring audience. The occasion was spoiled; Mark's anger cost him two strokes on the green, but Rosannah sank a twenty-foot putt slantwise up a slope. As they were walking to the seventh tee they passed the bush beside which he had spoken to her of love. "We've been here before," she said without stopping, in a low voice. "Do you remember?" There was no joke in her voice, but intimacy and shyness. "I remember," he said. She laughed. "You were so silly." "I meant it." "No, no," she said, "you meant something but not that. You were sweet. You kept banging the toe of your shoe with your putter." "Your eyes sort of crossed, or wandered around, one of them." "You noticed that?" "Sure," he said, "I was watching you so hard I still remember everything you did." "It's so humiliating; sometimes when I get all excited my eyes won't stay focused." "You're not engaged any longer?" "Oh no! You don't think I'd be —Say, are we playing golf, or aren't we?" As they walked from the clubhouse to the car he held her hand, and she sat close to him on the way home. But she would not let him see her to the door. She had a date that evening, dinner and dancing; "a new doctor in town, an acquaintance of daddy's, an internist, a dreamy dancer."

"I thought," said Mr. Birch during the first commercial of the evening, "that we'd drive out and see Calvin and Mona tomorrow night, right after supper." "Sorry, dad, I've got a date." "A woman?" said his father heavily and scratched his hump. "The girl we spoke of last evening, Rosannah Tavolga." "You never used to mention her." "No." "You don't go see your old friends any more. You'd rather spend an evening alone with your old man than go see your oldest school friends, but here a new girl jumps up out of nowhere and off you go." "Her father's a doctor, a skin specialist." "And a Jew for all you know. You're a sailor all right, my boy. A sailor, God help me." Mark could think of nothing but where Rosannah and the internist might have gone on a Tuesday evening and whether they would neck. He was thankful that being with Jane had relieved him of any simply physical impulse to make

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a pass at Rosannah; as it was, he could play at having a love affair with her, hurting nothing, serious about nothing, just hold hands and talk, kid stuff.

Next day by noon he had the jitters bad. He felt imprisoned in his father's house, yet there was absolutely no place in Syracuse he wanted to go to, no one he wanted to see exept Rosannah. Their date was for 5:30. He felt encapsulated within himself; he thought of breaking the date and flying down to New York so that Jane might tease him out of it, or tease him at least out of thinking about it; Jane was a fellow captive whose art it was to make him not mind his captivity, and sometimes even to enjoy it. He telephoned Rosannah. He knew that his own voice was more intense than was required to ask a girl whether she wanted to play golf; nevertheless, he was quite put off by the brisk, arrangement-making roughness in her telephone manner; she said she would play, not that she would like to play or looked forward to it, just that she would; he wondered if his manner had affected her.

She chattered with him brightly, as though he were a friend's cousin who had to be entertained for the afternoon. The pro caught them in the clubhouse and jawed for half an hour. As they were approaching the fourth hole, a one-armed fellow shouted "Coming through" at them, and came through without so much as a nod. She sliced her next drive off into a gully. And he blew up. "I've told you a hundred times not to do that," he scolded, and holding her head rigid made her swing correctly three or four times. "Is that all right, Mark?" she said, mocking his fierceness a little but at least he was Mark again. "Yes," he answered in a remote voice, "it's all right." He was thinking that he must get to her at this moment or he might not have another chance like it. He decided to risk a high trump. "I'm going back to New York tomorrow morning." "Why?" "My ship is sailing before long." "You won't come back before you sail?" Her voice was gentle and sensual again, and a little alarmed. "No, I won't." "I'm sorry." "I'll miss you, darling." She turned to put her driver in the bag. "Don't call me darling." "Why not?" "Oh, it's sort of a New York word, the way you pronounce it. I'm not going to be anybody's New York darling." "All right, Rosannah. Anyway, I *will* miss you." She strode angrily. "Then why," she said without looking at him, "did you come look me up? Just to get everything all churned up again?" "Why, I don't know what to say. I like you." "Hmph."

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He wanted to pull her back into shallow water. "How was your doctor last night?" "Sick," she said miserably. "He got drunk and told me that he hates God. Very sick, very sick." Mark suddenly thought of Jane's light way of saying three monosyllables quickly together, especially sick sick sick, and he realized that Rosannah who could not take another person's sickness lightly, would not toy with her own emotions; nor should he do so. "I'm sorry." "Sure." In a few minutes he saw her blow her nose on the other side of the fairway, with her head averted from him; his vanity was tickled that he had made her cry a little, but he did not want to do it again. And apparently she believed in God. But maybe she didn't go to church.

Until they got to the sixth green they spoke only of the game. There were no players in sight behind them. They both shot the hole in par, and laughing arm in arm did a victorious little schottische around the pole. "Why did you go to sea?" "Hey," he answered, pretending to stagger, "it's not fair to hit a fellow when he's off-balance. "Couldn't you get a job as an engineer?" "Sure. I just thought it would be fun to go to sea." "Was it?" "Yes." "Were you ever married?" "No, but what on earth does that have to do with anything?" "Nothing." She was looking off at the trees in a preoccupied way. She glanced at him for a moment, and a secret smile appeared on her lips. "So you're going back to your New York darling tomorrow." "What? I said no such thing." "Oh yes, you did, Mark Birch." "I did not." "Is she prettier than I am?" He trembled inside; he did not know where she was leading him. He gave her her bag and they started strolling toward the seventh tee. "No, about the same as you, in prettiness, that is." "Do you know why I think you went to sea?" "No, why?" "Women. You're afraid to get too much involved with a woman." "Oh I am, am I." "I think." "What am I doing here with you right this minute?" "Playing golf. Sort of flirting. Do you have to go back to New York tomorrow?" "No. I'm not due back on the ship till Sunday morning." "I want you to stay." "Well." Everything she'd said seemed to him true. "I dare you," she said. "I won't rise to that bait," he answered. She dropped her clubs by the bush and pulled a budding branch down so that she might caress a downy bud with her lips. "That is," he said, "I could stay if we had a chance, you know, if you liked me so that." "Oh, don't be stupid. You know perfectly well I like you. You're even afraid to say the

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word, aren't you? Listen, Mark." She put her hand to the side of his throat. "The question is whether you will let yourself find out if you love me. And let me find out too. I had hoped we would." "I'll stay till Saturday," he said, and even as he spoke he argued that at least he would have Saturday night to spend with Jane. He did not touch Rosannah. Her hand caressed his hair a moment. She had not paid much attention to his words. She said, "I still hope we will."

He was sure she had not planned this; yet it seemed to him ceremonial of her to say this by the same bush, the two of them alone after he had scolded her again like a teacher. And the words: of course the words were unprepared, just the words which the occasion brought forth from her, not, as his words to Jane had been, rigidly memorized; they were as nearly exact as words could be about such a matter; they were true. Yet, he thought, their power was not just in their truth nor in their spontaneity nor in the unconscious ceremony of the time and place, but in all these together and in his assent to all these. She was smiling a little, in innocent triumph, he supposed, at having got him to stay for three more days, but her eyes, meeting his, were unwavering and affectionate. It was time to kiss, his lips were ready to kiss; but his mind, the IBM machine in his mind, was ticking away at a great rate sorting out the ways by which he could tell her how well she had handled him. What his ears and thence his reaching hands heard his lips say was this:

"Rosannah, you have opened my heart."

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ANNE SEXTON

The Double Image

1

I am thirty this November.
You are still small, in your fourth year.
We stand watching the yellow leaves go queer,
flapping the winter rain,
falling flat and washed. And I remember
mostly the three autumns you did not live here.
They said I'd never get you back again.
I tell you what you'll never really know:
all the medical hypothesis
that explained my brain, will never be as true as these
struck leaves letting go.

I, who chose, two times
to kill myself, had said your nickname
the mewling months when you first came;
until a fever rattled
in your throat and I moved like a pantomime
above your head. Ugly angels spoke to me. The blame,
I heard them say, was mine. They tattled
like green witches in my head, letting doom
leak like a broken faucet;
as if doom had flooded my belly and filled your bassinet,
an old debt I must assume.

Death was simpler than I'd thought.
The day life made you well and whole
I let the witches take away my November soul.
I pretended I was dead
until the white men pumped the poison out,
putting me armless and washed through the rigmarole
of talking boxes and the electric bed.
I laughed to see the private iron in that hotel.
Today the yellow leaves
go queer. You ask me where they go.I say today believed
in itself, or else it fell.

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Today, my small child, Joyce,
love your self's self where it lives.
There is no special God to refer to, or if there is
why did I let you grow
in another place. You did not know my voice
when I came back to call. All the superlatives
of tomorrow's white tree and mistletoe
will not help you know the holidays you had to miss.
The time I did not love
myself, I visited your shoveled walks; you held my glove.
There was new snow after this.

2

They sent me letters with news
of you and I made moccasins that I would never use.
When I grew well enough to tolerate
myself, I lived with my mother. Too late,
too late, to live with your mother, the witches said.
But I didn't leave. I had my portrait
done instead.

Part way back from bedlam
I came to my mother's house in Gloucester,
Massachusetts. And this is how I came
to catch at her; and this is how I lost her.
I can not forgive your suicide, my mother said.
And she never could. She had my portrait
done instead.

I lived like an angry guest,
like a partly mended thing, an outgrown child.
I remember my mother did her best.
She took me to Boston and had my hair restyled.
Your smile is like your mother's, the artist said.
I didn't seem to care. I had my portrait
done instead.

There was a church where I grew up
with its white cupboards where they locked us up,

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row by row, like puritans or shipmates
singing together. My father passed the plate.
Too late to be forgiven now, the witches said.
I wasn't exactly forgiven. They had my portrait
done instead.

3

All that summer sprinklers arched
over the sea-side grass.
We talked of drought
while the salt parched
field grew sweet again. To help time pass
I tried to mow the lawn;
and in the mornings I had my portrait done,
holding my smile in place, till it grew formal.
Once I mailed you a picture of a rabbit
and a postcard of Motif no. 1,
as if it were normal
to be a mother and be gone.

They hung my portrait in the chill
north light, matching
me to keep me well.
Only my mother grew ill.
She turned from me as if death were catching,
as if death transferred,
as if my dying had eaten inside of her.
Somewhere you were two, but I timed my days with doubt.
On the first of September she looked at me
and said I gave her cancer.
They carved her sweet hills out
and still I couldn't answer.

4

That winter she came
part way back
from her sterile suite
of doctors, the sea sick
cruise of the X-ray;

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the cells' arithmetic
gone wild. Surgery incomplete;
the fat arm, the prognosis poor, I heard
them say.

During the sea blizzards
she had her
own portrait painted.
A cave of a mirror
placed on the south wall;
matching smile, matching contour.
And you resembled me; unacquainted
with my face, you wore it. But you were mine
after all.

I wintered in Boston,
childless bride,
nothing sweet to spare
with witches at my side.
I missed your babyhood;
tried a second suicide;
tried the sealed hotel a second year.
On April Fool you fooled me. We laughed and this
was good.

5

I checked out for the last time
on the first of May;
graduate of the mental cases,
with my analyst's okay,
my complete books of rhymes,
my typewriter and my suitcases.

All that summer I learned life
back into my own
seven rooms, visited the swan boats,
the market, answered the phone,
served cocktails as a wife
should, made love among my petticoats

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and August tan. You came each
weekend. But I lie.
You seldom came. I just pretended
you, small piglet, butterfly
girl with jelly bean cheeks,
disobedient three—my splendid

stranger. And I had to learn
why I would rather
die than love; how your innocence
could hurt and how I gather
guilt like a young intern
his symptoms, his certain evidence.

That October day we went
to Gloucester the red hills
reminded me of the dry red fur fox
coat I played in as a child—stock still
like a bear or a tent,
like a great cave laughing or a red fur fox.

And we drove past the hatchery,
the hut that sells bait,
past Pigeon Cove, The Yacht Club, past Squall's
Hill, to the house that waits
still, on the top of the sea:
and two portraits hang on opposite walls.

6

In north light, my smile is held in place,
the shadow marks my bone.
What could I have been dreaming as I sat there,
all of me waiting in the eyes, the zone
of the smile, the young face,
the foxes' snare?

In south light, her smile is held in place,
her cheeks wilting like a dry
orchid; my mocking mirror, my overthrown

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love, my first image. She eyes me from that face,
that stony head of death I
had outgrown.

The artist caught us at the turning.
We smiled in our canvas homes
before we chose our foreknown separate ways.
The dry red fur fox coat was made for burning.
I rot on the wall, my own
Dorian Gray.

And this was the cave of the mirror,
that double woman who stares
at herself, as if she were petrified
in time—two ladies sitting in umber chairs.
You kissed your grandmother
and she cried.

7

I could not get you back
except for weekends. You came,
each time, clutching the picture of a rabbit
that I had sent you. For the last time we unpack
your things. We touch from habit.
The first visit you asked my name.
Now you stay for good. I will forget
how we bumped away from each other like marionettes
on strings. It wasn't the same
as love, letting weekends contain
us. You scrape your knee. You learn my name,
wobbling up the sidewalk, calling and crying.
You call me mother, and I remember my mother again
somewhere in greater Boston, dying.

I remember we named you Joyce
so we could call you Joy.
You came like an awkward guest
that first time, all wrapped and moist
and strange at my heavy breast.

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I needed you; I didn't want a boy,
only a girl, a small milky mouse
of a girl, already loved, already loud in the house
of herself. We named you Joy.
I, who was never quite sure
about being a girl, needed another
life, another image to remind me.
And this was my worst guilt; you could not cure
nor soothe it. I made you to find me.

You, Doctor Martin

You, Doctor Martin, walk
from breakfast to madness. Late August,
we speed through the antiseptic tunnel
where the moving dead still talk
of pushing their bones against the thrust
of cure. I am queen of this summer hotel
or the laughing bee on a stalk

of death. We stand in broken
lines and wait while they unlock
the door and count us at the frozen gates
to dinner. The shibboleth is spoken
and we move to gravy in our smock
of smiles. We chew in rows, our plates
scratch and whine like chalk

in school. There are no knives
for cutting your throat. I make
moccasins all morning. At first my hands
kept empty, unravelled for the lives
they used to work. Now I learn to take
them back, each angry finger that demands
I mend what another will break

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tomorrow. Of course I love you.
You lean above the plastic sky,
god of our blocks, prince of all the foxes.
The broken crowns are new
that Jack wore. Your third eye
moves among us and lights the separate boxes
where we sleep or cry.

What large children we are
here. All over I grow most tall
in the best ward. Your business is people,
you call at the madhouse, an oracular
eye in our nest. Out in the hall
the intercom pages you. You twist in the pull
of the foxy children who fall

like floods of life in frost.
And we are magic talking to itself
in noisy lies. I am queen of all my sins
forgotten. Am I still lost?
Once I was beautiful. Now I am myself,
counting this row and that row of moccasins
waiting on a silent shelf.

Elizabeth Gone

1

You lay in the nest of your real death,
Beyond the print of my nervous fingers
Where they touched your moving head;
Your old skin puckering, your lung's breath
Grown baby short as you looked up last
At my face swinging over the human bed,
And somewhere you cried *let me go let me go.*

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You lay in the crate of your last death,
But were not you, not finally you.
They have stuffed her cheeks, I said;
This clay hand, this mask of Elizabeth
Are not true. From within the satin
And the suede of this inhuman bed
Something cried *let me go let me go.*

2

They gave me your ash and bony shells,
Rattling like gourds in the cardboard urn,
Rattling like stones that their oven had blest.
I waited you in the cathedral of spells
And I waited you in the country of the living,
Still with the urn crooned to my breast,
When something cried *let me go let me go.*

So I threw out your last bony shells
And heard me scream for the look of you,
Your apple face, the simple creche
Of your arms, the August smells
Of your skin. Then I sorted your clothes
And the loves you had left, Elizabeth,
Elizabeth, until you were gone.

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KATHERINE HOSKINS

Conversation Pieces

1) Perhaps the most terrifying of Freud's dicta is his denial of communication between people except by sound or sight. No ESP, but a wooden loneliness as of marionettes. Difficult to believe, more difficult to act on. Or rather, it's difficult *not* to act on the assumption of some rare, tenuous, "spiritual" flow.

2) I cannot read the twenties. They seem more scattered than the Impressionists. Aiken, Fitzgerald, Cather, Forster—Woolf, even. The poor writers like Michael Arlen are incomprehensible. I can't even follow their syntax. Even the good are self-conscious, self-indulgent—and of what sensitivity to ephemera, to fashion. Woolf does stand apart—by greater seriousness, gifts? But I am constantly wishing that she had not been born a lady.

3) Speaking of ladies, there is the plight of Edith Sitwell. *Façade* is so charming, so upper-class and of some value. But times change, horrors occur and she tries to record but the instrument won't take it. You can bury Pierrot to a guitar, but not England. And she really has not yet mastered the organ.

4) V. Woolf did as well as anyone could ask on Congreve. Best of all is her admission that you cannot really deal with him—the impact of a wave—marvelously hard and refreshing, yet gone on the instant.

It is odd that she didn't mention the patent influence of Shakespeare on him. Not influence, perhaps, so much as that C. knew him well and re-created in little some of his characters. Miss Prue's nurse is short-hand for the nurse in *R&J*, Maskwell is a commentary on Iago.

But I don't think that anywhere in S. is that beautiful frankness and honesty with which Congreve's lovers suddenly may address each other and that shows them pure and serene and intelligent in spite of their own affectations and in spite of the wickedness and frivolity that surround them. There is not, of course, much occasion for it in S.— but poetry prevents also.

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5) Not even a father can forgive his daughter for not being sexually attractive. Unattractiveness in a woman is not, in men's eyes, a misfortune; it is an insult to the male. It is an act, not a condition. And as one penetrates into what makes for "unattractiveness," one concedes that the man may, after all, be right.

The straight sexualist sees only the female and so, in his blindness, frequently behaves more generously.

6) It seems to me that the real, or the only possible theme of *Tender Is the Night* is the effect of a sick mind on a well one. One wonders if F. even knew that and, if he did, where on earth he thought he was clarifying it.

7) *Redburn*—remarkably readable. So many of our 19th century writers felt a necessity for homespun ease even in the arts. M.'s discussion of the hand-organ—"better than a hundred Parisian orchestras." And Emerson urged our own art, though it seems to have scared him a little when he got it. Mark Twain's scorn of things European. I suppose they were trying to get away from Washington Irving. Provincialism was their strength, and the ideals of the Revolution were still alive and present to them.

8) Art, the most serious, the least solemn of enterprises.

9) Lionel Trilling—the usual infatuation with Fitzgerald. Maybe *This Side of P.* and *Werther* are comparable—but the comparability of the two authors surely ends there.

Trilling stigmatizes Fromm and Horney as rationalistic, easy optimists. But I see no reason for clinging forever to the Puritanism of Freud.

Fromm's *The Forgotten Language* not so illuminating as I had hoped. Emerson's excellence on the subject of dreams is interesting and unexpected.

Still, the projection of Paradise—not of innocence but of love—is still unexplained. To say Eroticism gets us nowhere. Unexplained and undescribed. How common is it? Perhaps it's that fairyland that ruins you for this world, makes folk too nice for sex as is. A promise of possible development, of how one might live always. Sex as it could be. Bellini must have known it—*Sancta Conversazione*. But it isn't sentimental as his softness tends to be.

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Those guitars and windows of the Cubists suggest it—though perilously empty of people. And the charm, the beauty of the dream Paradise is that it is well-peopled. Perhaps the Cubists were not lonely.

It is as if the world were lawned and planted and terraced and the spring sun shed love as well as warmth and light. It is the world, people included, grown humane.

10) How wrongly they have named "an ivory tower" that malshaped if strong redoubt we need. Our protection is more in the nature of a stockade, trees quickly hewn and a crazily constructed look-out at one corner. Catch as catch can and thrown together during the melée.

11) Emerson's Journals—I find apothegms and moral statements more palatable piece-meal as they are here than when blown up and collected into essays. And, for the first time, I smell his greatness. The fragile greatness of man in the wilderness. The Europeans are bulwarked by their past. I don't suppose we shall ever have one—with us, it's always today or tomorrow. And our great men will always be self-made.

I can't pin it down, but that lack of past is a part of the new element the U. S. has given the world. I sometimes think that our volatility, our lack of memory, our wastefulness and other qualities that seem weaknesses could be the virtues of two hundred years from now. I can imagine a new ethos, a different hierarchy of values into which our characteristics would fit and do well. A world more fluid, more abstract—wherein all things are easily picked up, easily put down. A world without monuments and where one didn't save string, and of present rationality and charm. Wherein the ego has learned grace and poetry and uses them.

12) Emerson said that Thoreau's writing impressed him as when he watched a farmer go to infinite trouble on a job that he would have dismissed in the first place as not worth while. Perhaps that is one reason why Thoreau sells in the drug stores while Emerson remains in the study. Anyway, if you don't put your hand to what lies nearest, you start to bite your nails.

13) Is it too pragmatic to say that one would have more

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charity towards Catholicism if its practitioners were, if not happier, at least sweeter, stronger, more generous in spirit than the rest of us?

I sometimes think it's the devil's delusion; they all give such credit to evil. They bear witness, like any Protestant, but to evil.

14) When I dislike a person, I have great difficulty in remembering his existence. I leave in the middle of a conversation, find duties in another room. Perhaps it is that when I cease to like, to *dis*like renders too much identity. I destroy by forgetting.

15) The convenience of a pattern that needs only to be filled in—this time with blue predominating, now with yellow—

Charles Williams
Henry Green

Williams palls faster and tends to offend because his materials are serious. Green is overtly for fun, and so occasionally achieves a certain value. Patterns are for fun, so there is no disparity between his means and his effect.

Eliot's taste in prose fiction—where he goes, presumably, for pleasure and sloughing off of responsibility—is illuminating if not damning . . . Williams, Djuna Barnes.

16) If O'Neill had only possessed the language of his situations. That and the lyric irrationality so that action's logic would not always be immediately apparent. As H. said, we are ready to trust far and take much for granted.

17) I realize with some shame that I, neither, like to be turned inside out at the theatre. I doubt if I should ever be equal to seeing Martha Graham.

And the arena stage—the theory of theatre by participation seems entirely wrong. It seems there should be a gulf between the work of art and the audience—a little space where admiration or understanding can function.

It is the *mask* of tragedy or comedy we want—not the raw material, and not the neighbor speaking through them.

18) My writing makes me what, in old rural terms, was known as egg money.

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But recent conversations that put the need of extra money squarely up to me have no inspiring effect. They drain my already ebbing confidence. When all that is required is to do one's best, one is free. This whip of money induces fears and wonderings, the desire for the safe thing, the fear of embarking on anything.

19) It seems that it is for lack of courage rather than for any tangible sin or ill-doing that we pay and suffer punishment. I suppose that, all the way back, man has, to exist, needed courage more than strength, more than goodness. And, like all primitive virtues, courage has extended and taken over the moral and aesthetic provinces and become necessary to them also.

20) Quite a chore at 3:00 a.m. to look back at various crossroads and decide if it were really high performance and virtue that decided the choice, or lack of courage.

21) As we grow older, we tend to answer in character. That is why the young make such mock of their elders and pay so little attention to their dicta. They are quite aware that a question does not provoke a thought or felt response—merely the old set of words, the wooden gestures of that old ham the Ego.

22) When Unamuno is tossing out the possibilities of belief, one goes hand in hand with him—gaily examining and dropping behind this credo or that. But when he picks one and says, This is IT—then, in all friendliness, one drops the comrade's hand and says, Then stay, brother, by all means, and God be with you. And one walks on alone. This must be especially so with so individual, informal a philosopher because though one may thoroughly agree with his generalities, his specific illustrations and details are his alone. The formal philosophers deal in generalities and logic, but I am incapable of going even a step with them. I keep forgetting what the words mean.

23) At the end, you don't even say Brother to Unamuno, but turn away in disillusion and a kind of horror. "The Grand Inquisitor is kinder than the merchant," War is better, greater, something of the sort, than peace, etc. And the thread of rationality that runs through all the mystico-sadism makes it even worse.

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24) September is a moment between summer and fall. Like a Sancta Conversazione—but the outlines are clearer—the peace positive and unshadowed. And it is very quiet. No birds, and always late afternoon.

25) The facile metaphysics of the mad—

26) Before man can ever become generous and just and reasonable, family will have to wither. It is a sweet-smelling, beautiful and poisonous weed.

27) *The Old Man and the Sea*—even C. recognizes the phony quality and recalls, though she doesn't understand why and didn't 'like' them, "Fifty Grand" and "The Killers" . . . All animal stories have to be sad—the animal has to die and the man who caused death sorry. One might as well stop with Krag, the Kootenay Ram. That is at least not dressed up with pseudo-ignorant philosophy and electric organ stops. C. was, of course, right to suggest *The Call of the Wild* in preference to either, any.

Foxy Faulkner won *his* brush for animal stories by not killing the bear.

28) The Hyperion Picasso

The Hyperion Gauguin

The inevitable fault of any modernity, that of giving equal weight to unequal talents.

The Picasso is a book to own. And strange that the cubisms of Sacré Coeur, etc. have never been reproduced. They seem his most irreproachable period.

Gauguin should have illustrated fairy tales, old legends. Strange how much harsher a destiny a man may seek than, apparently, his soul requires. An over-playing of the psychic hand.

29) Was it Cassou who called Rousseau one of the inventions of Apollinaire? Well, many inventions have proved of longer duration and of more worth than their inventor. But it may be that it is only my fraternal feeling for R. that makes me defend and admire him.

30) How James maunders (*The American Scene*) and then

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hits the nail on the head. *Weakness* is still the one word for the South. And the War, the folly of weakness . . . We hate still to admit that folly can kill as many men as wickedness.

31) How to describe a Death! The individual nature of a dying is what was most impressive. That, and the appearance of learning something—something I, certainly, could not conceive of; with attributes too exaggerated for human consumption. Exaggerated in the way that labor pains suggest the love-making of gods—or rather, not two gods but Zeus, say, with a very suffering, astounded mortal.

32) Perhaps it is his hall-mark—that little aureole of loneliness, of distinction from everything else that Congreve sets about people. The opening of *The Way of the World*. A naturalness that is completely winning. But a naturalness framed and set there—not like Tchekov's which ebbs and flows but has never that extraordinary freshness and is never a moment off from everything else. It comes suddenly, between two, a dewy quality; albeit in this case, the principals are a couple of foppish young men.

33) The line—with Lowell laden like a poor woman's wash day; with MacLeish festooned like Christmas wreaths; what I really enjoy is Stevens' tensile spider web.

34) *Absalom, Absalom*—interesting how many of the details are repeated in *Intruder in the Dust*.

Stevens is split between law and poetry; Faulkner between first-class writing and trash. One wonders why he had to return to *Sanctuary* and try to make it retroactively a good novel with all that nonsense about the nun. Or are all writers who don't enter the monasteries of teaching going to get lost in lonely Cenobitic wanderings? With F. it's as if he had been reading his critics and adulators and taken them seriously.

Absalom is, however, first class—though not all of the surprises surprise since they are the only possible reasons for such and such unreason. One wonders if he reads much Conrad.

In Conrad, unreason or exaltation spring from rather abstract conceptions—Lord Jim's guilt, Ransome's seamanship. With F. they are reactions to fact—Bose has negro blood, there-

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fore; the baby is a girl, therefore. This gives solidity but prevents the characters from engaging one's wonder or awe. They may be mad, but they are never bigger than life and, usually, seem smaller.

35) Confidence equals Hope plus Courage.

36) Sex brings intimations of Love. I doubt we ever get any closer to it.

37) A. once remarked that man is not capable of leading a purely material existence and getting away with it. That is the principal source of this middle-aged woe. When the vital energy lessens, the soul—blighted, distorted, angry from years of starvation and neglect—is at last able to voice its needs. Unable to understand the strange language, the owner tries to drown out the noise, but is no longer strong enough.

38) Fame and good fortune allow a man to become himself. Vide Hemingway, My luck she is running good. He has become all those people he has written about. It probably means that he is finished, complete. No more art will come from that state. The grown tree doesn't put out great convolutions of boughs, only small vernal twigs. Yet, it is something to grow into the tree you were capable of becoming. Most are so pruned and starved that they melt into the shrubbery background and only the loving eye can detect the strong, gnarled, stunted basal limbs.

39) There is nothing so easy as a life of sacrifice.

40)	The basic virtue	Courage
	The basic vice	Cruelty

41) At Temple, in April, the peep of hylas and the clatter of frogs late at night sound like a whole people on the road, far off, on some mysterious march or procession—an Anabase of springtime.

42) Where a woman asks for understanding, a man is usually content with forgiveness.

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43) Except in extraordinary circumstances, suffering is in proportion with the temperament of the sufferer rather than with the injury offered.

44) It is often a question whether an appeal to our better nature is not really an appeal to our cowardice.

45) Sex minus love equals therapy—a dangerous resort, however.

46) Suddenly one realizes that the faults of another person are his weaknesses, the faults as in a rock. Theoretically, then, a person cannot hurt you by his faults, you merely feel sorry for the suffering they entail him. As you might feel sorry that a house wasn't better built. It may fall down on you and kill you—but you can't hold it against the house.

47) Freud worked like a poet. I suppose all the great do.

According to him, this business of growing old is about as perilous as the business of growing up.

Is it not simply the resurge of Puritanism that makes the moderns say he over-emphasized the importance of sex?

Just as one can often better get at the essential quality of a painter by his sketches than by his full-dress productions, so Freud comes clearer through his letters than his books. The quick, gnomic statement—

48) One is answered to the limit of one's questioning.

49) April—Temple. The air is still, the sun hot. I heard the grass grow—a snapping and crackling all around under the quiet of last year's leaves. Like a small twig fire. I imagine it is only on days of rare heat and quiet that you can hear it—perhaps only one day in several years. It is like when the frost comes out of the ground, but louder and more irregular.

50) Never get bored with your misfortunes, for they are your faithful and enduring friends, ready to provide you occupation to the last.

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51) As A. said, Duty is no doubt a life-rope for the majority of people. It remains true, however, that if you give a man enough rope he will hang himself.

52) All right—you want to write a narrative poem, about people rather than heroes. How to clean your mind of Robinson's back-stitch, of Frost's coziness, of Eliot's sentimental toughness. There must be a fall of words more truthful than these and also elastic. Peter Clavier is too abstract—all past tense, reflective rather than narrative. And a versified story isn't what you want, either.

53) The neurotic is always cruel. Or, is it—Only the neurotic is cruel?

54) The ingredients of human nature may not change from one generation to another, but surely the proportions do.

55) Into how pitifully small a compass can a man's work be compressed—all the nights and days of Shakespeare in a moderate volume. The painters are less docile—Rubens must be seen in all his acres. Even the small insistent dignity of Rousseau demands extent in space. Yet, of painters even, even the most flamboyant, how small the residue beside the magnificent expanse of life from day to day and hour to hour.

It is some such notion as this, most dimly apprehended, that lies at the bottom of woman's scorn for art. It is not enough, she feels. The sacrifices are too great. The artist is the sucker, par excellence. He is also, as far as she is concerned, the con-man par excellence.

The mistake, of course, lies in confounding life with art. They have little to do with each other and the one in no way replaces the other. Which do you want? No—the question is, Which must you choose? Which has chosen you? And a good life is no less pitiful in its achievements, in its littleness of good. Only the artist can glorify it—by envy, by the alien vision.

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LOUISE BOGAN AND MAY SARTON

Translations from Valéry

The Birth of Venus

Out of the mothering deep, still cold and sweating,
At the storm-beaten threshold, here the flesh
Vomited to the sunlight by the bitter wash,
Tears itself free from the diamond fretting.

Her smile forms, slips where the white arm lies,
Weeps down a bruised shoulder's rosiness,
Pure treasure of the watery Thetis,
And her hair runs a shiver down her thighs.

The pebbles, spattered, tossed aside—so agile
Her course—crumble a thirsty sound, and fragile
Sands drink as they kiss her childlike bounds;

Vague or perfidious, she has a thousand glances;
Her flashing eye, the lightning's awe compounds
With smiling sea, and the waves' faithless dances.

Bather

Like fruit her naked flesh bathes in a pool
(Blue in the trembling gardens) but over the brim
The gold head shines, detaching the hair's coil,
Strong as a casque, cut off at the throat by a tomb.

Beauty forced open by the rose and the comb!
Born from the mirror itself where her jewels steep—
Bizarre broken fires whose hard cluster bites
Her ear given up to naked words and the soft deep.

A rippling arm drowns in the water's hollow
Because of a flower's shadow plucked in vain,
Ravels, washes, dreams toward delight to follow,

While the other, curved simply under the lovely sky,
Moistening her hair's luxuriant fold,
Catches a drunken insect's flight in gold.

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In Sleeping Beauty's Wood

The princess, in a palace of pure rose,
Sleeps under whispers changing shadow brings;
A word on the bright mouth, half-uttered, shows
When the lost birds peck at her golden rings.

She does not hear the raindrops as they fall,
Tinkling a far-off century's lost praise,
Nor hears above the wood a wind's flute call
Tearing across the hunting horn's far phrase.

Let the long echo give back to sleep the waking,
Always, O more resembling the soft vine
That balances and on your sealed eyes beats.

So close to your cheek, and slowly, the blown rose
Will never dissipate those delicate pleats
Secretly sensitive to light's falling rays.

Caesar

Caesar, calm Caesar, standing on all that is,
Fists clenched in his beard, and somber eye informed
By eagles and the sunset's combat stormed,
Your heart swells, and feels itself all-powerful cause.

Vainly the lake quivers and laps its bed of rose;
Vainly the young wheat shines like precious metal;
You harden and knot in the tension of the will
Order, at last forcing your mouth to unclose.

Enormous world, beyond horizon's end,
The Empire waits for lightning, the decree, the brand
Which will change evening to a furious dawn.

Happy on the waters, rocked by chance apart,
A fisherman sings and, indolent, floats on,
Ignorant of the bolt gathering in Caesar's heart.

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ROBERT BRUSTEIN

Theatre Chronicle

MOST OF THE NEW PLAYS on Broadway this season are singular for their ostentatious anti-realism. In MacLeish's *J. B.*, the titular character—his brow twisted by pain and his tongue by rhetoric—endures a laborious torment in a nonillusionistic setting as choral characters wander casually through the audience, onto the stage, into the action; Manley Halliday in *The Disenchanted* blunders boozily through gauze walls to sentimentalize over a past full of parties; and the heroes of those Oriental plays[1] which have swooped down on New York like locusts tippy-toe through multiple settings in multicolored costumes. The seamy-atmospheric parlor of Gazzo, Inge, Williams, Miller and Chayefsky is being junked in favor of a more fluid stage and more open forms: *J. B.* substitutes Brecht theatricalism filtered through Thornton Wilder; *The Disenchanted*, a nostalgic memory play; and the others, Radio City spectacularism disguised as a serious attempt to capture the "cultural texture" of Eastern nations.

But Broadway's periodic gestures towards anti-realism are only a coy flirtation with dramatic radicalism; both its realism and anti-realism deal with externals. Whether dressed in an Oriental gown or a torn tee shirt, the characters are equally gormless, while the ideas and formulas remain fundamentally the same. The more flamboyant forms have been inspired, I should guess, less by a playwright with a vision than by a set designer and a director with itchy creative fingers, for, rather than proceeding from the material, they seem imposed upon it, and all to disguise how terribly fatigued the material really is.

The only plays this season that have freshness and life are quite unpretentious in their techniques; new works by O'Neill and Osborne and a revival of a little-known play by Chekhov make it clear that realism is far from exhausted as a form. But the realism of these plays is a long way from that psychological schematism and conscientious detailing of the surface practiced on Broadway. It is defined rather by the authors' attempt to determine a moral reality in a world dedicated to appearances.

Chekhov's *Ivanov*, an earlier play than his better-known works, is chock full of Boulevard machinery: there are interrupted love scenes (à la Turgenev), thundering revelations, startling reversals, and a highly melodramatic curtain in which the hero shoots himself in full view of the

[1] The most pretentious of which is *Rashomon*. Billed as a "new play" by Fay and Michael Kanin, this upper middle brow concoction is an imitation of an imitation of an action, the original imitation being not Akutagawa's stories so much as Kurasawa's film. The plot, structure, acting, directing and costumes are a crude parody of the movie's—and even the dialogue often reads like subtitles. Clearly, the play is superfluous (especially since it is so far inferior to the film) but in the last scenes Broadway inadequacy yields before Broadway vulgarity. After a scene directed in the manner of a bedroom farce, the authors drive home an affirmative moral, lest the spectator be left in any doubts or ambiguities.

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audience. No one disapproved of this type of dramaturgy more strongly than Chekhov (he boasted triumphantly that, in *The Cherry Orchard*, he had composed a play without a single pistol shot) and, no doubt, much of it was imposed by Russian companies enamored less of dramatic subleties than of explosions in the wings. Yet, despite the technical blunders of *Ivanov*, the play comes out of a fully developed sensibility; I know of no other work which so vividly communicates both Chekhov's essential sweetness of character and hardness of mind.

In *Ivanov*, as in most of his drama, Chekhov anatomizes a shiftless, mindless, backbiting provincial society, but here he examines its effect on a potentially superior, though superfluous, man. Once unequalled in his energies and enthusiasms, the hero is now bogged down in a slough of melancholy, boredom, self-pity and self-disgust. Although his marriage to a Jewess began in love, it is ending in indifference. She is dying now, and he not only does not have the energy to be decent to her, but increases her suffering and hastens her death. During much of the play, Ivanov is striving to understand his own condition, but he can only conceive of it in metaphors, concluding that he has suffered a spiritual strain—the way athletes strain their muscles—from too much exertion.

Most of the other characters, however, interpret his behavior more melodramatically, according to their individual simplistic views. The majority, like the moralistic doctor, Lvov, read him as a Tartuffe whose actions are coldly calculated to advance his fortunes, while to the impressionable young Sasha he is a melancholy Hamlet in need of salvation through unselfish love. Although Ivanov seems indifferent to slander, he is susceptible to hero worship, and so he destroys himself by yielding to her advances.

Ivanov, in fact, yields to most things without much of a struggle. He has lost mobility in all but his powers of thought. A passive victim of circumstance, he cannot even control his cruelties to his wife—the insults rise to his lips unbidden. But even at his weakest, he has the most accurate attitude towards his behavior, as when he tells Sasha: "My whining inspires you with a sort of reverent awe . . . but in my opinion this neurotic state of mine and all the symptoms that go with it are just something to laugh at, and nothing else!" Ivanov is alternately ludicrous and pitiable because at the same time that he is a subject for ridicule he is the only one in the entire district who knows it. In this he is similar to Chekhov's faint-hearted Don Juan, in *That Worthless Fellow Platonov*—while the satiric object, he is also the satirist, nagging mercilessly at his own defects.

What, aside from his weakness, has caused Ivanov's spiritual disrepair? Only the alcoholic clown, Lyebedev, partially glimpses this, and then only for a moment, in an insight which Ivanov immediately rejects as a cliché: "It's your surroundings that are killing you." With the province populated by miserly gossips, scheming stewards, card-playing idiots, aggressive young girls and title-hunting widows, Ivanov's surroundings provide neither example nor opportunity for meaningful action. Because of this lack of honorable precedent, Ivanov's uncle, the Count, is preparing,

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in a parallel plot, to make an ignominious marriage: "Everyone's so low and small-minded and dull witted and I'm vile even to myself . . . . Everyone's rotten, so I'll be rotten too." The old virtues have disappeared; the old enthusiasms have lost their point. Ivanov, like Dr. Astrov in *Uncle Vanya*, is a weak man of secondary talents curdling in a meaningless society.

Out of this comes inertia, and out of this inertia, self-flagellation. Prepared to slide into a destructive marriage with Sasha, Ivanov is brought to a helpless realization of his hopeless condition:

> Wherever I go, I bring misery, blank boredom, discontent, disgust with life. . . . I'm ruined, hopelessly ruined! Before you stands a man tired at thirty-five, disenchanted, crushed by his trivial efforts—burning with shame and jeering at his own weakness. . . . Oh, how my pride revolts.

The only question left is which form of self-destruction Ivanov will finally choose. In this version, he puts a bullet through his head—in a more honest version, he might have married Sasha—but in either case he is finished, for now he is incapable even of work, the author's usual prescription for despair. *Ivanov* is Chekhov's most hopeless play. He comes closer here than in any of his mature plays to the brink of nihilism, and only his humanity prevents him from falling over.

The production of *Ivanov* was a tribute to the increasing professionalism of off-Broadway. Roberts Blossom as the Count is that rare thing, an American artist who combines taste, talent and intelligence; playing Ivanov, Paul Stevens, though a vocal actor, transcends his own limitations with a performance of seriousness and honesty; and Sorrell Booke admirably catches Lyebedev's beauty of soul, weakness of character, and comic pathos. I was disturbed, however, by the director's handling of the Jewess, who was interpreted as a shrill, unpleasant shrew, apparently to make the lines of sympathy clear (the point is that they are not intended to be clear), and some of the other parts were acted with too much preciosity and petulance.

Eugene O'Neill's cutting insights into the nature of truth and illusion resulted in four plays of some coldness but of enormous statute and depth. *A Touch of the Poet*[2] is not equal to those two monstrous masterpieces, *The Iceman Cometh* and *A Long Day's Journey*, but it is superior to most of his early work. Sometimes overly schematized, sometimes ponderously symbolic, the play is, nevertheless, generally free from the phoney literary posturing, the philosophical hollowness and the clumsy experimentation which mar plays like *The Great God Brown* and *Strange Interlude*.

In his last plays, O'Neill is trying to determine just how much self-knowledge his self-deceived heroes can sustain without collapsing. They usually experience one horrifying glimpse into the abyss, one grotesque moment of revelation, before taking refuge in a new illusion. The persistent theme of O'Neill's last work is that life cannot be endured without

[2] Published by the Yale University Press. Cloth, $3.75; paper, $.95.

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a life lie—the truth will not set you free but kill you dead. Thus Hickey, in *The Iceman Cometh*, is permitted to escape into an irrelevant fantasy that he is insane rather than acknowledge that he put a bullet in his wife's brain through hatred; and, thus, Cornelius Melody, in *A Touch of the Poet*, is stripped bare of his old pretenses only to find sanctuary in new ones.

Melody, a former Major in the British army and a hero of Talavera, assumes an aristocratic heritage despite the fact that he is descended from a newly rich tavern keeper. Creating himself in a crude Byronic image, proud and isolated in his contempt both for Yankee merchants and the democratic mob, he adheres to the codes and virtues of his adopted class. His swaggering cruelty and self-glorification are a torment to his family, particularly to his adoring wife whom he treats like a servant. But in the last act, when he is beaten about the head by the hirelings of a Yankee who, he thinks, has insulted his daughter's honor, he undergoes a startling change. He shoots his mare (the symbol of his aristocratic affectations), begins talking in a thick Irish brogue, and demeans himself even more than necessary in the actuality of his humble birth. Having dispensed with the Major's pretenses and assumed those of a peasant, he is able to give his wife the love he always withheld from her, but he has become mean-spirited, groveling and sly. Poor but proud before, he will now use any chicanery to advance himself and his family. He announces the death of the Major while his daughter, who has hitherto desired such an awakening, begins to mourn the hero's death.

Set near Boston in 1828, O'Neill's last play is obviously designed to make some general statement not only about the characters but about the America in which they live—a statement probably to be elaborated in the uncompleted plays of the projected cycle. According to Harold Clurman, who directed the Broadway production, O'Neill intended a sweet message of congratulation. The play, he writes in a program note, "represents one of O'Neill's efforts to transcend his pessimism"—since "the new industrial society about to emerge in the period immediately following the action of the play . . . is . . . justified," the work embodies "what I suspect was always O'Neill's credo in this regard: that America can only fulfill its promise when its inherited idealism becomes truly one with its genius for the practical."

Perhaps this theory accounts for the ameliorative production the play is given. Lodged in one of those overdecorated houses with infrared rays in the marquee to shield the audience from the cold night air, it is directed to cast no cold on the audience inside either. I can think of no reason, apart from Mr. Clurman's theory of the play, why Helen Hayes should have been permitted to superimpose Mrs. McThing on the part of Melody's wife; she gives the impression, through ingratiating gestures, mischievous inflections and a waddling gait, of a star determined to compensate for the ignominy of a non-stellar role by having an extra-dramatic love affair with every member of the audience. Both Eric Portman and Kim Stanley give performances of depth and honesty (though Miss Stanley displays annoying vocal mannerisms similar to those of six or seven other Broadway actresses), but on the whole the play has been staged with a cheerful in-

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souciance which waters down its effect. Mr. Clurman's tendency to compromise bleak plays with affirmative meanings is new neither to him nor to Broadway[3]—in this production, however, it results in a serious dislocation.

For if O'Neill meant to say anything about America, it is that when the country went Jacksonian it also became petty, indiscriminately egalitarian, and acquisitive; in fact, in its lack of hard virtues, the new society emerging at this time is not too dissimilar to that of *Ivanov*. Con Melody, like Chekhov's hero, makes a claim on our attention because of special properties. If he lacks Ivanov's superior consciousness, he has the pride, honor and bravery which make him capable, not of tenderness, but of heroism. And although, instead of abdicating from life at the end, he stays alive by joining the mob and assuming their values, Melody has chosen not life but mere survival. Rather than having been "crushed in order to be reborn again," as Mr. Clurman would have it, Con Melody is now, spiritually at least, as dead as a mackerel; he doesn't put a gun to his head simply beacuse it is futile to "waste a good bullet on a corpse." Thus, Melody's new role, though just as false as the old one, makes him a smaller, more shallow, American. The play is a tragedy of a hero divested of his heroism, shorn of his tragic possibilities.

A word about the technique and language of this play. It is structured in a centripetal manner, beginning slowly and moving forwards by means of ever narrowing circles of repetition towards a shattering climax, a technique O'Neill used effectively, though somewhat laboriously, in all the plays of his last period. As for the language, I found it the most successful O'Neill ever devised, though still some distance from really striking stage diction. In the speech of nineteenth-century Irishmen, O'Neill seems finally to have found a music congenial to him, and I sensed here little of that inarticulate stammering so common to his other plays. *A Touch of the Poet* is added proof that at the end O'Neill developed into a sound dramatic craftsman with an authentic tragic theme. It is sad but inevitable that he achieved this not as the darling of the Theatre Guild and the Sunday supplement but rather as a lonely ailing man in a shuttered room unable to bear much light.

Epitaph for George Dillon[4] is a recalcitrant work which has stubbornly refused to expire instantly at the behest of Brooks Atkinson and Walter Kerr. A flop on Broadway, it was reopened at popular prices in a smaller house where it has now closed again after eking out a pitiful commercial existence. The new run, I should add, was practically subsidized by the enormously gifted artists associated with it and two new producers,

[3] In *The Fervent Years*, Clurman relates how he induced Paul Green to change the ending of his play, *The House of Connelly*, to a more hopeful one: "Our sense of the perfectability of man, or at least, the inevitability of the struggle against evil . . . made us impatient with the play's violent ending. . . ." This habit, partly as a result of their Utopian progressivism, partly for commercial reasons, seems to be a nervous tic with many Group Theatre graduates—witness Kazan's softening of *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*.

[4] Published by Criterion Books. $2.75.

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Norman Twain and Bernard Miller. After two visits, I still find it an extraordinary play mounted in a superb production. The acting is the most striking I have seen in years, particularly that of Robert Stephens who can do more in an instant with a soft chin, a cutting voice and an elastic body than a whole Studio-full of American actors spreading their low pressure emotionalism over an entire play.

What is so encouraging is the evidence the play offers that John Osborne is a developing artist[5] and not simply an *enfant terrible*. I should confess at this point that I was not overpowered by Osborne's other two plays. *Look Back in Anger*, despite occasional direct hits, seemed to me too diffuse in its fire power, mainly because the author was not sufficiently complicated in relation to his hero, while *The Entertainer* tended to dribble off into formlessness and incoherence. Towards Osborne, I shared the attitude of Thurber's old lady towards the naked light socket—I felt electricity escaping all over the room. In *Epitaph*, however, this electricity has been forged into a more accurate weapon and hurled towards fully comprehended targets.

Like *Look Back in Anger*, this play is concerned with a young man of energy trying to function in a spiritual vacuum, only now the author has developed more ambiguity towards his protagonist. In fact, the complex hero of *Epitaph* frequently recalls the hero of *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*, and it is clear that Osborne has adopted George Orwell as his spiritual godfather, adjusting his vision to fit the flatulent fifties. Both George Dillon and Orwell's Gordon Comstock are would-be artists unsuccessfully trying to pursue their careers in a world essentially hostile to anything but commodity success. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not *money*," reads the epigraph to Orwell's book, "I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." After a stubborn struggle to live without money, Orwell's hero finally succumbs to hard facts, surrendering to the world of alarm clocks, tasteless parlors and aspidistra plants because, though they may be ugly, they are life itself. For Orwell in 1935, poetry is painfully irrelevant, and submission to the tough family values of the middle class is a social imperative.

Osborne, however, lacks Orwell's trust in change. Consequently, although the alternatives of the hero remain the same, his final choice is more hopeless. The Elliots, a petty bourgeois family with whom George Dillon lives, are infinitely more formidable than anyone with whom Gordon Comstock has to cope, and George sees their monstrous taste as if through a magnifying glass. An appalling group of painted birds, a scream-

[5] One should not be misled by the information that *Epitaph*, composed in collaboration with Anthony Creighton, is Osborne's first play. Originally written in flashbacks, it was so thoroughly revised for its London and New York productions as to be almost a new work (the revisions, by the way, have left it ambiguous in some areas and irrelevant in others). The tight form of the play may be partly attributed to Creighton, but the power is certainly Osborne's. As I understand it, Creighton contributed the family scenes, which, though adequate, are hardly inspired, while Osborne created the more compelling scenes involving George.

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ing television set, and a horrifying neon cocktail cabinet which does everything but play "God Save the Queen," are the modern monuments of a people afflicted with a nasty poverty of feeling:

> They think in clichés, they talk in them, they even feel in them—and brother, that's an achievement! Their existence is one great cliché that they carry about with them like a snail in his little house. . . .

To Osborne, the Elliots are the lower middle class of England: hardy, strong, sometimes warm and hospitable. but essentially spiritless caricatures manipulated by American mass culture. Only the chirping mother displays any real feeling, and this is more often a mawkish memory of feeling about her war-dead son.

But the play is not a melodrama. George is possessed of his own unpleasantness, and he exploits and victimizes the Elliots to serve his own purposes. The action determines whether George will eat this family or be eaten by it. Unable to drug himself with political or religious panaceas, the only thing between him and surrender is an intangible, his talent, for he has nothing left to believe in but himself. But even his belief in his talent is far from a certainty. He half realizes that he is of that doomed and blasted tribe which Freud called "pseudo artists," possessed of the artist's painful symptoms without his abilities; and added to this he has a bitter skepticism about the value of his calling anyway. Consequently, when asked, "Do you have any integrity?" he can only sidestep the question. It turns out that he doesn't, and not much talent either. But when he examines the alternative—the "warm, generous, honest-to-goodness animal lying at your side" who helps you to forget—he discovers a vapid bored creature whose only passion is for mambo records and jazzing at the Jubilee.

Trapped into an impossible marriage, suffering from TB, and turning out dreary scripts, his surrender becomes a gesture not of acceptance but of defeat. Nothing remains for George but to compose his own epitaph in that mood of elegiac self-recrimination shared by Ivanov and Con Melody:

> Here lies the body of George Dillon, aged thirty-four—or thereabouts—who thought, who hoped, he was that mysterious, ridiculous thing called an artist. He never allowed himself one day of peace. He worshipped the physical things of the world, and was betrayed by his own body. He also loved the things of the mind, but his own brain was a cripple from the waist down. He achieved nothing he set out to do. . . . He was a bit of a bore, and frankly, rather useless. But the germs loved him.

Dancing with Mrs. Elliot at the curtain, he dwindles into bones while desperately trying to suck nourishment from her warm embrace.

In all three of these fierce, tight, uncompromising plays, it should be clear that the heroes, though of different nationalities, are of strikingly similar temperaments. But even more striking than their similarities are their differences from the characters of most contemporary American drama. They labor neither to be ingratiating and sweet-tongued nor inarticulately sullen and brooding; they are all unpleasant, but no one is

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more aware of this than themselves. They move towards shattering crises but since these are spiritual and moral rather than psychological, their difficulties are not resolved by love or by psychiatry or by exposing Mom for the villainess she is—they are not resolved at all—and though their fates are terrible, they are not compelled to make strenuous affirmations. Most heretical of all, they do not strive to become as well adjusted as the audience for they are far more conscious and vital than the audience. It is, in fact, the values of the audience with which they are in conflict, no matter how they eventually succumb. The consequence of this is three plays which make serious demands not only on the viscera but on the intelligence, three works of power that do more than the non-realistic forms to open up the parlor in contemplation of the world at large.

B. H. HAGGIN

Ballet and Opera Chronicle

THE NEW YORK CITY BALLET'S winter season offered new ballets, a new principal dancer, and dancers in new roles. Two of the new ballets, William Christensen's *Octet* to the piece of that title by Stravinsky, and Birgit Cullberg's *Medea* to music of Bartok, I take to represent Balanchine's sheer desperation in his search for ballets by other choreographers; for the first was a slight classical piece in which one saw something very much like the Balanchine movements put together without creative power; and the second, like Miss Cullberg's *Miss Julie*, offered not a dance equivalent of the poetry of the original play of Euripides but a danced and mimed narration of the few incidents of a transformed and cheapened story of the play, which alternated between cliché and literally meaningful contrivance of the calibre of Medea's angry kicks at the prostrate Jason.

Balanchine himself was prevented by illness from completing his promised ballet to music of Von Webern; and his contributions were therefore the new *Native Dancers* to Rieti's Symphony No. 5, and the revival of the 1933 *Seven Deadly Sins* to the text of Berthold Brecht (translated by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman) and the music of Kurt Weill. *Native Dancers*, with its lighter-weight music, was a slighter piece of the kind of *Square Dance*: a dance toccata employing the virtuosity of Patricia Wilde and Jacques D'Amboise in a context supplied by a group of boys and girls, with new dance ingenuities from Balanchine's seemingly inexhaustible store, some of them involving horsey conceits related to the title (the boys were in jockey silks; the girls, in charming costumes by Peter Larkin, had their hair in ponytails; the setting by David Hayes was part

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of a racetrack). In *The Seven Deadly Sins* I find it necessary to distinguish the realization in production from what was produced: certain of the stage incidents, as contrived by Balanchine with the assistance of Rouben Ter-Arutunian's scenery, costumes and lighting, and as executed by Allegra Kent and her associates, worked effectively as theatre; but what was staged so brilliantly began with the incongruity of an image of Berlin of the twenties projected onto Memphis, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Boston; and to this initial incongruity were added the incongruities and perversities of the morality play about the dutiful daughter whose discharge of her moral obligation to her family was achieved by various immoralities which taught her the various moral lessons about pride, anger, lust and the rest. These were amusing at times in their cockeyed way; but for me the Brecht-Weill ideational world is one that yields no esthetic satisfactions.

In addition Balanchine partially reconstructed the second act of *The Nutcracker*—having the Sugar Plum Fairy right at the start establish herself as a character by dancing the solo she used to dance later after the pas de deux with her Cavalier; having her then summon all the other characters to welcome the little boy and girl; and, after these characters had danced for the little boy and girl, having the Fairy dance not with a Cavalier but with the four male characters of the Chocolate, Coffee, Tea and Candy Canes divertissements. It all made excellent stage sense; but it involved a loss of the superb pas de deux which the Fairy used to dance with her Cavalier—and a loss which I find unnecessary. Balanchine was reported to have justified the elimination of the Cavalier by arguing against the introduction of a romantic theme so late in the work; but I would think that to the little boy and girl it would seem reasonable for the Fairy, when at last she dances for them, to do so with a Cavalier who in the children's minds would correspond to the little boy who is the little girl's cavalier in their dream.

The new dancer was Violette Verdy, who had appeared with the American Ballet Theatre in September, and who operated in the New York City Ballet style not only with exciting technical security and bravura but with the clarity and continuity of outline and the projected personal radiance and force that one sees in Allegra Kent's dancing, and that made Verdy literally stand out in the ensemble as Kent does. Interestingly, though Verdy's style was very strong and Kent's was exquisitely delicate I found that it was Kent who exercised the greater compulsion on my eye when the two appeared together in *Symphony in C* and *Divertimento*. And I found also that the two, with their radiated brightness of presence, made everyone else in those pieces seem drab. In this I intend no reflection on the accomplished dancing of Patricia Wilde and Melissa Hayden here and elsewhere—in particular Wilde's virtuosity in *Native Dancers* and *Square Dance*, and Hayden's sharp clarity and exactness in *Agon* and *The Four Temperaments*.

Diana Adams' return to the company was a return also to the Pas de Deux of *Agon*, in which her long legs and arms made her more effective

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than Kent; but in *Swan Lake* and *Apollo* she did not achieve the clear outline of exquisite bodily configuration that Kent exhibited. *Apollo*, moreover, seemed to me to suffer from an exaggerated and excessive muscularity in D'Amboise's performance that I don't recall in earlier performances by other dancers; though I must add that much of what D'Amboise did in the piece—notably his soaring leaps of wonder and delight around the Muses—was excitingly effective (and I will observe parenthetically that the quiet elegance and grace of his solo after the pas de deux in *The Nutcracker* is an additional reason for restoring the Cavalier to that ballet). Also, it seems to me logical that a ballet about a god and the Muses should be danced in costume, and that the god, in particular, should not be in the black tights that are the male dancer's uniform in the New York City Ballet, with a shirt that looks like two large handkerchiefs knotted together.

In *The Four Temperaments* the Melancholic Variation had new and exciting effect from Francisco Moncion's powerful presence and the largeness and weight of his movements: clearly he was the predestined dancer for this episode. In a few performances Jonathan Watts, in place of D'Amboise, was sharply clear and agile in the Sanguinic Variation; and in one performance Arthur Mitchell, substituting for Todd Bolender, offered the interesting experience of the opening solo of the Phlegmatic Variation danced straight, as against Bolender's practice of making the movements humorous and letting his face convey how humorous they seem to him—the result being that as executed by Mitchell the solo was not only not amusing but largely not recognizable.

An even more striking instance of this occurred in *Agon*, in which Edward Villella, in Bolender's absence, danced a number of times in the first Pas de Trois. Here too Bolender not only executes the eccentric movements in ways that make them humorous but appears to look at them as though they seem humorous to him. But in contrast to Villella's usual grin was his dead-serious face as he conscientiously exhibited the individual movements and their connections in the dance phrases with a clarity they had not had in Bolender's performances, but also without a trace of their humorous effect in those performances. One wondered how Balanchine felt about this—whether he preferred the dance clear or amusing.

Villella's grin was in evidence in his triumphant performances in *Stars and Stripes*, *Western Symphony* and *Symphony in C*. And after his brilliance in these works it was astonishing to see him in the Candy Canes divertissement of *The Nutcracker*—to see him, that is, not achieve in this episode the dazzling speed and agility and elevation of the regrettably departed Robert Barnett.

Not only did Balanchine's illness cost the season his new ballet to Von Webern's music, but a series of injuries to Villella, D'Amboise and Mitchell wrecked the announced programs of the last week, causing the cancellation of the last *Agon*—and—even more important—the last two *Apollos*. More important, since even among the works that tower above the others

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it is *Apollo* which seems to me to stand out as Balanchine's most beautiful and most extraordinary achievement.

The excellence of Arturo Basile's conducting of the New York City Opera's *La Cenerentola* aroused my interest in what he would achieve in something like *La Traviata;* and it turned out to be a performance notable in the way he held the singing to the coherent shape he gave the work, and at the same time made the orchestra's playing live with the singing. In this he benefitted by the fact that he was working not with Metropolitan stars but with New York City Opera singers willing to accept direction; and that one of these singers was Phyllis Curtin, who gave not only an admirably musical vocal performance but the most intelligently thought-out and convincingly executed dramatic performance of Violetta that I can remember.

The American Opera Society, after its impressive beginning with Bellini's *I Capuletti ed I Montecchi* and Giulietta Simionato, continued with Handel's *Julius Caesar*, which it had given in 1956, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. The work contains some of Handel's most beautiful music, of which two high points are Cleopatra's exquisite "*V'adoro, pupille*" and her superb arioso "*Che sento, o Dio!*" with its developing violin figure. And it was the occasion for some excitingly beautiful singing, not by the stars of the performance but by the counter-tenor Russell Oberlin and the contralto Maureen Forrester. There was good singing also by the bass Ezio Flagello; but Siepi's voice was rough-textured, and Schwarzkopf's singing was one of her series of facial and vocal affectations—the face elaborately changing its configuration for the change of attack and color with every note. It would have been better to have again Leontyne Price, whose lovely voice and musical phrasing in the 1956 performance were breathtaking.

The Society's next production—Rossini's *Moses* with Boris Christoff—was considerably less successful: both the composer and the singer pretended to more than they achieved. Much of the work is a straining after solemn grandeur which achieves only dullness; and even the vocal writing in Rossini's more usual style falls short of what he achieved in his comedies and in *William Tell.* Christoff, making a long-delayed New York debut, exhibited a voice that was rough and dry and afflicted with strong vibrato when he bellowed in what he considered the style of Chaliapin's successor, but did some beautiful singing in *mezza voce.* As for the others, the soprano Gloria Davy revealed shocking deterioration—in the form of strong tremolo and loss of fullness and warmth in the upper range—of the voice that had been so lovely in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* a year before; the tenor Jon Crain managed his high and florid part with accuracy but with disturbing tightness and strain; and the most impressive singing was done by Jennie Tourel and the baritone Chester Watson. In addition, the performance conducted by Arnold Gamson was at times unprecedentedly ragged, and the semi-dramatic goings-on this time were farcically chaotic.

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Though the Little Orchestra Society offered its performance of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* as the first since the Metropolitan's in 1916-17, actually the opera was given by the American Opera Society in 1955. It is a late work of Gluck and a very fine one, with notable expressive orchestral writing in the accompanied recitative; and one feature of the performance conducted by Thomas Scherman was the finished and beautiful playing of the orchestra. As in the 1955 performance there was ear-ravishing singing by Leopold Simoneau; and Gloria Davy produced some lovely sounds in the lower range of her voice, though her high notes were again cold and tremulous; but Martial Singher's threadbare and strongly quavering baritone was painful to hear, and he carried the "acting" of the performance to more than the usual absurdity. For the rest there was good singing by Louis Quilico and Margaret Kalil, and a beautiful contribution by William Jonson's Choral Art Society.

The New York Pro Musica Antiqua repeated at the Chapel of the Intercession of Trinity Parish the reconstruction of the twelfth-century *Play of Daniel* that it had presented the year before at the Cloisters. The early music is nothing for present-day ears by itself; but the totality of naive text, music and costumed action and spectacle—as realized with loving care and taste in this production with its costumes and stage design by Robert Fletcher and direction by Nikos Psacharopoulos—is charming and, in the end, moving.

Notes on Contributors *(cont.)*

KATHERINE HOSKINS, winner of a Guggenheim Fellowship this year, is currently in Europe. Her new book of poems, *Out in the Open*, is to be published shortly by Macmillan.

ROBERT BRUSTEIN, an assistant professor of dramatic literature at Columbia University, has had film and theatre criticism published in various periodicals. This is his first appearance in this Review.

W. D. SNODGRASS will be teaching at Wayne State University next year.

NORTHROP FRYE, chairman of the department of English at Victoria College, Toronto, was recently appointed principal of the College. His next article for this Review will deal with the effect on contemporary culture of comparative religion and orientalized ideas.

A book of literary criticism by MARIUS BEWLEY, *The Eccentric Design*, has recently been published by the Columbia University Press.

MARVIN MUDRICK, of Santa Barbara College, has a Guggenheim Fellowship for 1959-60.

NORMAN N. HOLLAND teaches English at M.I.T., writes film criticism for an educational radio station in Boston, and has published a number of articles on films.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

"I Had Not Known Death Had Undone So Many"

FIRST, A CAUTION. Names appearing in this article do not necessarily refer to any living magazine: alive or dead, one might mischievously add. What I have in mind is, that the hardest fact to ascertain about the Little Magazine is whether or not it exists. Moreover, there is a little magazine, *Trace* (ed. James Boyer May), which already tries to catalogue Little Magazines, and keep a record of casualties. But the questions go further. What can be the state of affairs in Britain, when these are the magazines it produces? What kind of contribution can be looked for from a range like this one? The answers are none too reliable, because of addresses that don't answer enquiries, grubby envelopes where a postman has scrawled "gone away," and references marked "not in library." But here they are.

Political Magazines

Before I reach the literary magazine itself, another kind of periodical ought to have a mention. This is the little magazine in politics, and here there have been interesting recent developments. Lively, lightish, lavish, and put out for a wide audience, the conservative *National and English Review* falls somewhat off the present track, although it publishes occasional literary articles and verse, and once a fat poetry supplement. The Left is different. The literary interest of *Plan* (monthly journal of the Progressive League) is on the whole confined to reports of its parent body's Contemporary Poetry Circle. *The University Libertarian* ("for university anarchists, rationalists and humanists") has been running for a lively and provocative two years, but seldom touches literature or the arts. Two other new Left journals, however, certainly do: these are *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*. In recent issues *The New Reasoner* has published translations from Brecht, Tibor Devy the Hungarian writer, and Nazim Hikmet the Turkish communist. It has also included Arthur Miller's recent address to the Authors' League of America, some very vivid impressions of Pasternak, notes on Rivera with illustrations, and a version of Adam Wazyk's "Critique of the Poem for Adults." *Universities and Left Review* opened with a series of strikingly significant articles (by Lindsay Anderson, Peter de Francia, John Berger) attacking the dead weight posing as impartiality of old-fashioned "liberal-humanist" criticism in cinema and the arts, and examining the moral and social status of the critic. Both these journals are expressions of a vigorous and laudable movement to re-think the left-wing position in a fundamental way. But from the standpoint strictly of poetry or the other arts considered in themselves and not as instruments of something else, their relevance is limited. The articles by Anderson, de Francia and Berger were very specifically

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on how to judge what was valid in art, and what invalid, from a given political position. This certainly has important implications for the art itself: but the implications were not where the stress fell. The point is clearer perhaps from this: *New Reasoner* printed Wazyk's poem next to Hamish Henderson's verses of fraternal greetings from the blacksmiths of Leith to the blacksmiths of Kiev (complete with melody and refrain, "O horo the gillie more"); against which I have nothing, save that they might have been written by William Morris. A certain conclusion is plain. This vigorous movement is one which leaves its literary and artistic concerns in the middle distance, rather than one which obtrudes them or issues from them. That is no surprise. The times invite it. But the fact remains.

The Literary Little Magazine

The literary Little Magazine can concentrate on publishing new work, or on contributing, by reviews, articles, translations and the rest, to the literary climate which fosters new work. Three prominent magazines, on the whole of the latter kind, have recently ceased publication. *Mandrake* (ed. Arthur Boyars), which ran steadily if irregularly for years, looked sympathetically if sometimes critically to Richards, Empson and, notably, Leavis; it published a number of the exhaustive verbal analyses of poetry which John Wain later collected into a book called *Interpretations*, and its contributors included Wain, Robson, Alvarez, L. D. Lerner and Marius Bewley. In fact, an issue in 1953 stated outright that "the talent of the age was finding its truest expression" in criticism rather than creative work. *Nimbus* (ed. Tristram Hull, David Wright and others) and *Nine* (ed. Peter Russell) were opposed to "analysis" and to any form of critical hegemony, but both contained critical articles of interest (I shall return to two of these) and *Nine* was particularly valuable for the editor's annotated chronicles of large numbers of literary and scholarly new books, and for a genuine attempt to sustain contact with foreign literatures.

The Little Magazines which aim first, or almost exclusively, at printing new work, have in recent years included *Stand* (ed. Jon Silkin: it has now expired), which came a good deal nearer to *Nine* than to *Mandrake*. "If only" (we read in a review by the editor) "Mr. Larkin would let himself go and become passionate, I am sure his feelings would, in conjunction of course with his ample technique, permit very good poetry." *Outposts* (ed. Howard Sergeant) is akin to *Stand*, with reviews and poems—some of them good—by Dannie Abse (who is fairly close to Silkin), and incidentally also with what seems like a strong liking for echoes of Yeats ("So I have named my child / Cassandra for that one/ Who told that Troy must fall," is the most blatant of many). Perhaps a short poem on Mallarmé, included in one issue, throws light on *Outposts*: the poet is seen (somewhat in terms of the last stanza of Shelley's "Ode to Liberty") as a *swan* shunning open space and dropping down into "the narrow well of words" there to sing while "the steep / Wall strained up stepless." All in all there is a good deal in this spectacular image (not least, whether steps would help a

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swan anyway) which would give pause to, say, George Hartley, the editor of *Listen*. *Listen*, with Roy Fuller, Larkin, Davie, Elizabeth Jennings, and Anthony Thwaite as characteristic contributors, comes decisively out against the Apocalyptics of the 1940's and 1950's; its reward in *Trace*, which appears to be having trouble with its prefixes, is to be called "consistently *neo*-romantic." To add that for me *Listen* is among the sounder of these Little Magazines, largely because at its weakest it is dull instead of ridiculous, is merely to flagwag on an issue about which readers will probably have their views already. More interesting is the fact that it is in a minority among little magazines. Almost the only other one to stand in the same camp is the improbably called *Elegreba* (ed. Roye McCoye: the title is Abergele, where it is printed, written backwards); and this resembles *Listen* so closely that one is tempted to think it is ghost-edited for George Hartley himself, preparing for the moment when Dannie snatches up his Abse and chases that neo-romantic editor over the Welsh border. Most of the little magazines I have seen tend to be on the other side; though *New Chapter* (ed. Robert Bruce and Leslie Candappa) is broadly based, and prints Jon Silkin on the one hand, Alan Brownjohn (a *Listen* favourite) on the other, and Vernon Scannell somewhere in between. It will barely do to see the distinction as one between the "New Lines" and the "Mavericks" poets—to recall for a moment the two anthologies which went by those names. The chief fact about the first of those anthologies was that it opened its pages far wider than any true community of purpose extended among its contributors; the chief fact about the second, that half the poems in it ought to have been in the first. But when, in a rather slight periodical called *The Window*, we find lines like

> *This waxen man, cold as the melon moon*
> *Ranging abroad, from fire and salt tide free*

the interests and antecedents behind the poem are clear enough.

A number of Little Magazines that turn up along this track seem to have inter-relations which are vaguer and more complex than I can fully unravel. Thus *Ore* (ed. Eric Ratcliffe), with a handsome printed cover but otherwise cyclostyled throughout, has a sharp editorial about university careerist-poets, reviews by, or of, Abse and Silkin, and a good deal of verse (some of it carefully done and far from bad) which is reminiscent of Dylan Thomas in one way or another, and marks it clearly off from *Listen*. So, to its credit, do its occasional pieces in or from Italian. That the editor of *Ore* contributes his own verse to *Man*! the Anglo-American anarchist magazine, and includes verse and prose by the literary king-pin of *Plan* and the Progressive League, are only background facts; somewhere, little poetry magazines are sure to have a frontier with anarchist politics, experiments in community living, censorship discussions, sex reform, or all of these. *Ore* seems genuinely linked, though, with *Friday Market* (ed. A. L. Shearn) and *New Helios* (ed. Peter Jones). The editor of *Friday Market* is far from relying on the cyclostyle; he has a private printing press, and experiments in typography. But to a large extent,

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the contents of these three magazines are interchangeable, and the editor of each tends to publish in the others.

Friday Market published a full account of the 1957 annual meeting of the Writers' Guild, and it is natural enough to pass on from it to *Troubadour*, the official magazine of that body. But for my own part, I am disquieted when I find the Editor of the magazine and President of the Guild (Mr. Kennedy Williamson) asserting that the new writer is apt to "underestimate the need to learn the professional technique," and as for *Troubadour*, its poems begin "Oh little lonely moon between the pines" or "Her tousled hair was warm as corn," or end " . . . But none have held the wonder / Of the brightness of her soul," and I cannot take it seriously. With it can go *The Poetry Review*, organ of the Poetry Society (whose President is Chairman of the Editorial Board, of which Mr. Williamson is also a member). This is a numerous body with a special (and in part vested) interest in poetry reciting. Reviews occasionally include books of foreign literature, though not contemporary foreign literature; but something may be inferred from a comment in a favourable notice of J. B. M. Barrère's lecture, "Le Regard d'Orphée": "The reader must understand, though, that this, his inaugural lecture, is itself in French." The Poetry Society also publishes *The Voice of Youth* (ed. John Graddon), printing verse by associate members who are children and adolescents. In this one reads that to a poet the poem is "a vessel to transmit the light of his beauty of spirit." All which, though I most powerfully and potently believe (in a sense), yet . . .

Regional and University

Poetry Folio (published by the Kent and Sussex Poetry Society, President the Hon. V. Sackville-West) excites a flicker of interest in me as a Kentishman, anyhow. *Humberside* is more ambitious and serious, with some fairly solid articles on Freud and the like. *Northern Broadsheet* (ed. Dorothy Una Ratcliffe) comes from Edinburgh, but seems mainly North-of-England in scope. Its Editor is President of the Yorkshire Dialect Society, and it includes, besides the predictable pabulum of the regional magazine, verse in the Yorkshire dialects (the three Ridings carefully distinguished) and some poems by more widely known writers like Anthony Thwaite, James Kirkup and Robin Skelton. The *Swindon Review* is unique in Britain, in that for a number of years it has been published by a Borough Council (Swindon, Wilts.). The verse is professedly by "serious amateurs," and the best of the contents (apart from the lavish illustrations) are historical and antiquarian. Nevertheless, it is a great credit to a somewhat drab South-of-England railway works town.

Oddly at first glance, perhaps most university publications belong with the regional magazines. This is because British universities are of necessity important regional institutions, and at the same time are far from seeing contemporary literature or the contemporary arts as part of their commitment. *Universities Quarterly* (ed. Boris Ford) reviews some literary books, but its articles are chiefly on education and educational subjects (school

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as well as college), and it is useful, serious, highminded and sometimes just a little vacuous ("literature does not explain life any more than life literature, it is the interaction of the two that makes for significance," makes the punchline of one article). Student newspapers or magazines are often lively (the Edinburgh *Student* runs good political and social articles of a left-of-liberal kind, and one serious literary review usually of a critical book); but their readers seem to get duller as they get older, for of the university graduate publications I have seen, only the Durham *Journal* (ed. J. C. Maxwell) has any strong cultural pretensions. This includes a fairly wide range of good reviews of academic books, and learned articles on general subjects mainly by Durham writers. The others are Alumnus Chronicles and strictly nothing more (or if there is more, it will be to adapt Horace *Odes* I.9 for a fall of snow on the local hills: which is perhaps less).

Oxford itself has a pure alumnus journal in *Oxford*, and no other graduate journal save *The Oxford Magazine*, the don's weekly. Cambridge has no alumnus journal (each college has its own), and its *Cambridge Review* is equivalent of the *Oxford Magazine*, and equally parochial; though here sometimes the High Heels, and sometimes the Low, take up the space. The undergraduates each have weekly newspapers and monthly magazines (Oxford, *Cherwell*, *Isis;* Cambridge, *Varsity*, *Granta*). *Isis* has recently gone for solid, factual—and controversial—political or social articles: the results have been the spontaneous appearance of a frivolous counterpart, and a successful attempt by the proprietors to intervene. Thus Oxford and Cambridge both publish a spectrum of publications which reflect them as the microcosm societies which they in fact are: but only two of these have any general literary significance. These are *Essays in Criticism*, the academic criticism journal which was launched some years ago from Oxford, and *Delta*, in Cambridge, which is written by undergraduates and research students, and looks (I write in the broadest terms) towards Lawrence for its creative writing and Leavis for its criticism or social comment, though it occasionally branches out into an enterprising jamboree on some foreign author (e.g. Stig Dagerman). In neither of these two cases do the universities themselves deserve any direct credit. Finally, to complete the spectrum analysis, I should mention the brief magazines which steadily rise and fall in Oxford and Cambridge, like *Couth* (c. 1955), a sometimes brilliant Oxford spoof magazine of fashion, art and pseudo-culture, or recently *The Play's the Thing* at Cambridge.

All in all, it is (though no one seems much the worse for it) an odd situation if one views it without taking for granted all that usually is so taken. The only magazines in Britain which have any official college status, which definitely foster new writing, and which I have seen, are *Grapevine*, from the Durham Institute of Education (likeable, but no beacon) and *Leeds University Poetry*. The latter announces itself as a publication (annually) of the Leeds Department of English Literature. It is avant garde enough to have something like a "contemp." cover in 1956, and (as well as reflections of northern moorland landscapes) some verse

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that reads like *Listen:* "Since then I know that truth can draw great lies," and so on. The existence of this annual collection reflects the existence at Leeds of the Gregory Fellowships in Poetry and Painting, which make this university the only one in Britain where there is something like an American resident poet.

The Smaller British Nationalities

One important fact remains: that some of the liveliest Little Magazines are the opposite of "English" in that they represent one or other of the smaller nationalities in the British Isles. *Icarus* (Dublin, ed. Christopher Fitz-Simon) was still running in 1957, though it has now, I believe, ceased. Its verse drew heavily on Yeats, and in particular—un-English this by now—the early Yeats ("I would live in that valley of rocks beside the lake"; "Last night I rode at dusk with the windy fairies' band"). It published, however, a translated short story by Ivo Andritch of Yugoslavia, and in coming out tartly for serious theatrical standards as against the allegedly cosy and relaxed ones of Dublin Officialdom, it is somewhat reminiscent of the Scottish *Lines Review* (ed. Sidney Goodsir Smith). This periodically snorts at the Burns Federation and the "horrible post-Burnsian doggerel" of the *Burns Chronicle*, and can amiably include a slashing neo-Leavis review of the editor's own poems. Contributors to *Lines* also (like everyone else) often pass a small check through the Yeats Grand National Bank, but on the whole it is both broad and lively; issues have included a shrewd and informed essay on W. S. Graham, and a "Lallans" sonnet after Corbière. The *Saltire Review* (ed. Alexander Scott) began with rather more serious pretensions than it has been able to retain: its fiction (and sometimes verse) now tends to invite a relaxed attention, and its articles are consistently kept down to about 1000 words. It preserves, however, a wide range of lively reviews on mainly Scottish interests. Wales comes in with *Dock Leaves*, (ed. Raymond Garlick), which includes old-fashioned poetry ("telling her beauty") but also an occasional pointed though friendly dig at Kingsley Amis (that Little Englander beyond Wales), and well-informed, even learned articles on modern Welsh painters (with excellent illustrations) or bilingualism or early Welsh poetry. In fact, if *Lines Review* were compared with *Listen*, and *Dock Leaves* with *Humberside*, which are the English Little Magazines which they most look like and sound like, the inference would be that the English were duller and more parochial than the other British nationalities. Needless to say, the comparisons are empty, for a Scottish or Welsh Little Magazine occupies a wholly different place in its national culture from an English one. Yet for all that, the comparative liveliness of these minority-nation publications may prove significant. And since either to include *Threshold* (Belfast, ed. Mary O'Malley and John Hewitt) here, or to relegate it merely to *Humberside* and *Poetry Folio*, is to risk my neck, I will put it in here, and note its occasional good poems by Thomas Kinsella, its serious historical articles on Irish personalities, and its penetrating notices of the London theatre.

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What follows?

Perhaps we know what a Little Magazine or range of Little Magazines ought to be like, if it is going really to foster, encourage—and thus obtain—a new work of a high order. Until recently, I should have mentioned three things: to bring steadily before readers, in translation or otherwise, recent outstanding work by American or foreign writers; to make a signal, from time to time, towards significant developments in the other arts; and finally (though there is no special reason to expect this to be produced mainly by the new writer of talent himself) to print new and lively ideas *about* writing (which is not necessarily the same as general critical estimates and revaluations).

Seen against these expectations, the haul from British Little Magazines today is meagre, the prospect gloomy. However much my survey has missed, that fact is plain. If those three things represent the soil out of which creative achievement most readily comes, then the soil is not there. There are a few scraps, and that is all. Nor is a closer look at the scraps always encouraging. In a 1956 issue of *Nimbus*, George Barker had an article on The Image in poetry. Yet if this fact induces optimism, prepare to shed that now. Mr. Barker, admiring the Image for the "multiplicities and correspondencies it conceals," asserting that these startling newcomers derive from a "compression operated and applied by the passion" was just re-hashing Eliot of 39 years before him. The article that probes a literary idea this way does not point to a crop of new ideas, but to a dearth.

The obvious, the easy conclusion, is that things are bad, that nothing is going on. Many people draw it frequently, loudly, and with apparent relish. Occasionally, I suspect, its cash value is: "I wrote verse when I was twenty, and now I've chucked it." The easiest and perhaps most likely conclusion may indeed be that nothing is going on; but a less obvious one is more interesting and is worth considering. This is, that there is indeed a current development, but one which is by its very nature unexciting and inconspicuous, and which we have trained ourselves not to see, because we have trained ourselves on the kind of literary originality, and the conditions of literary originality, of a generation ago. For after all, don't my three expectations for a Little Magazine best fit the 1910's, with Pound and Eliot and Wyndham Lewis? And wasn't that, at least for Britain, not a typical productive situation, but a highly special one—peculiarly cosmopolitan, peculiarly iconoclastic and articulate?

This train of thought is led a step further by a very curious fact about two articles *on* writing which have appeared recently and which do seem to represent new thinking. Moreover, they appeared in virtually opposite places, representing something like opposite parties; and if they have something in common, that points to a deep community underlying surface differences, and important as such. One was an article by Philip Sherrard in *Nine*, April 1956, called "Unwritten Criticism." It was none too explicit a piece, but its gist was to disparage intellectual, analytical, and moralistic criticism, in preference for a kind of response which sensed in a

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work the presence of wider and vaguer awarenesses; and which therefore less easily took the shape of a critic's formal evaluation. Sherrard suggested a link, moreover, between these two kinds of literary approach and two wider general outlooks: analysis and moral judging with a sense of original sin and a striving for redemption; what he wanted with a kind of creative joy beyond good and evil. The other document was by Philip Larkin in *Listen*, Autumn 1957. The gist of this was that poetry is being made into a study, and is no longer thought of as a pleasure: "but at bottom poetry, like all art, is inextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure seeking audience he has lost the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute."

It is no part of my purpose to endorse either of these, even (for the moment) in part; and again, the easy answer is that they are selling out and turning middle-brow. But somehow it rings hollow. This is not just because the little magazines in which these articles appeared probably have better credentials than any others; nor because the pieces themselves displayed (as they did) a closeness of thinking and an absence of cynicism which might be misguided but which could barely be a sell-out. It is because of something deeper. This is, that those who sternly and high-mindedly refuse to look in any direction but forward often in the end find that what used to be forward has turned into backward. This is a general truth, which one forgets, in any context, at one's peril. So one ought to have in mind that, a whole generation after Eliot, there could perhaps be a way in which not a decliner or a seller-out but a creative and original writer, might find intellectuality becoming insistent enough to be an oppression, might veer from toughness and complexity towards pleasingness or even a kind of vagueness. Cultural communities must turn sometimes vigorously outwards; sometimes, perhaps, more tentatively inwards and backwards. Is this the deep impulse which runs through the situation in Britain now—or much better, one real part of what runs through it? If so, that will explain some of the obvious facts quite as well as the hypothesis of decline. The comparative vigour of magazines emanating from the smaller, outlying nationalities; the willingness of poets near the forefront of development today (and of opposing loyalties, moreover) to live in the provinces or publish in regional periodicals; the sustaining of interest in, say, Edward Thomas; the notable revival of interest in Romantic poetry; the recent apparent cessation of *Mandrake*, *Nine* and *Nimbus*, the critical-argument, comparative-literature magazines; the much more cosmopolitan appearance of "Big Monthlies" like *The London Magazine* or *Encounter*, whose editors partly carry on from the 1930's;—finally, the quite imitative or even "traditional" quality of most of the verse I have examined;—all these facts would fit neatly in. Nor would it be the first such period. How old-fashioned and parochial, how much a sell-out, did the Wartons and Gothick seem to the Palladians, and surviving Rymers, of the 1740's? Yet (improbably) it was from the former, not the latter, that the future grew.

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Reviews

W. D. SNODGRASS

Spring Verse Chronicle

No one is ever sure where the artist stands in relation to the artistic fashions. It is easy enough to say that the real artist stands outside all schools; unfortunately, it is not always true. Consider the Cubist paintings of Braque and Picasso; they remain, certainly, among the best work of either man, yet are almost indistinguishable. Neither is it true that the greatest artist always sets the fashions, leads the direction which lesser men will follow; if there is Berlioz, there is also Brahms; if there is Blake, there is also Pope.

The problem is specially interesting in connection with Theodore Roethke's collected poems.[1] Roethke has always been the kind of poet who learns from the literary movements, who makes ardent and extensive tours of the literary battlefields and frontiers, bringing back all sorts of yarns and souvenirs to that rather simple prosy style which seems to be his home. The stylistic progress of *Words for the Wind* is like a history of twentieth-century American verse seen in miniature.

It is surprising to look back to his first book, *Open House* (1941), and find not only poems which are open and easily graspable, but even a sort of romantic lyricism which verges toward sentimentality and ladies' verse. This is followed, though, by *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (1948) where a marked prosiness comes into the verse texture, bringing with it, especially in the green-house poems, very real success. Here, already, are many favorite Roethke poems—"Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt and Frau Schwartze," "Root Cellar," "Weed Puller," "Dolor," "The Minimal," and "Big Wind," which ends

> *. . . she rode it out,*
> *That old rose house,*
> *She hove into the teeth of it,*
> *The core and pith of that ugly storm,*
> *Ploughing with her stiff prow,*
> *Bucking into the wind-waves*
> *That broke over the whole of her,*
> *Flailing her sides with spray,*
> *Flinging long strings of wet across the roof-top,*
> *Whistling thinly under the wind-vents;*
> *She sailed until the calm morning,*
> *Carrying her full cargo of roses.*

[1] WORDS FOR THE WIND, by *Theodore Roethke*. Doubleday. $4.00.

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—and seems to find an ideal balance between lyricism and prosiness. Here also is "Last Words" with its clear suggestion of the direction Roethke would take in his next book, *Praise to the End* (1951)—a plunge into the wildest and most experimental poetry of the experimental period. It seems fantastic that the same man who wrote the passage above could have written that below (from "Give Way, Ye Gates"):

Believe me, knot of gristle, I bleed like a tree,
I dream of nothing but boards;
I could love a duck.

Such music in a skin!
A bird sings in the bush of your bones.
Tufty, the water's loose.
Bring me a finger. This dirt's lonesome for grass.

Except for a few constant themes, like the identification with animals, everything has changed. Yet, having made this transformation, Roethke returns (in the *Shorter Poems, 1951-1953*) to a very simple and chaste lyricism where he finds, among other things like "A Light Breather" and "Old Lady's Winter Words," the beautiful "Elegy for Jane."

The new poems in *Words for the Wind* begin with a section of lighter poems and poems for children. The two light poems, "Song for the Squeeze-Box" and "Reply to a Lady Editor," maintain their comic tone with unflagging skill; they are unmitigated delights. The children's poems seem to me less successful. I have the feeling (though I have not experimented with this) that children would respond more readily to some of those earlier poems where Roethke wrote as a child than to these where he so pointedly writes at one. Could any child resist the rat in "The Lost Son"?

The shape of a rat?
It's bigger than that.
It's less than a leg
And more than a nose,
Just under the water
It usually goes.

On the other hand, among the new poems I find "The Sloth":

In moving-slow he has no Peer.
You ask him something in his Ear,
He thinks about it for a Year;

And, then, before he says a Word
There, upside down (unlike a Bird),
He will assume that you have Heard—

A most Ex-as-per-at-ing Lug.
But should you call his manner Smug,
He'll sigh and give his Branch a Hug;

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Then off again to Sleep he goes,
Still swaying gently by his Toes,
And you just know *he knows he knows.*

I don't know whether or not that would appeal to a child; it certainly appeals to me.

Back among the *Shorter Poems, 1951-1953* one found a villanelle, "The Waking," which, very fine itself, yet recalled Empson, Auden and Thomas, and so suggested that Roethke might join the new formalism. In that book, too, one found "Four for Sir John Davies" which showed and credited a heavy debt to Yeats. And in most of the new poems in this collection these two tendencies are almost overwhelming. This is particularly true in the section of Love Poems. These poems, each lovely in itself, seem to diminish one another when printed in a block. Though one cannot be sorry that any of them has been written, the marriage of Yeats's ear to Roethke's images does grow tiring. Still it seems ungenerous, in the presence of such poems as "Words for the Wind" or "I Knew a Woman," to complain much.

The poems grouped as Voices and Creatures, too, are only partially successful. Only a part of Roethke's great energies are being called up; sometimes he coasts on the cadence polish. On the other hand "The Shimmer of Evil" is very strong, "The Snake" charming, and "Slug" (alas, too long to quote) is a real marvel, using the old prosy cadences and free verse but with a new reach of tone and attitude. My feeling of some dissatisfaction continues into the next section, a series of monologues called "The Dying Man," dedicated to the memory of Yeats, and entirely under his influence. This is perhaps the best Yeats-derivative I have seen, yet that derivation does impose a severe limit.

The book closes, however, with a bonecrushing cycle of poems, "Meditations of an Old Woman." Here, again, is a strong influence; not Yeats, but Eliot, especially the *Four Quartets*. For some reason, however, I find this echo less confining than that of Yeats. Perhaps this only reflects my own failure to find the *Quartets* entirely satisfying in themselves. Or it may be because this influence brings Roethke back once more to that prosier style where he does the work I like best. At any rate, Roethke seems here to have accomplished (or, at very worst, to be upon the verge of) a language which many of the best poets his age and younger, among them Lowell and Berryman, have been dreaming about and working toward—a language free from the constrictions of verse movements, free to use all the cadences of prose, yet able to collect the power of, say, the best passages from Lattimore's translation of *The Iliad*. Consider this simile from the First Meditation:

As when silt drifts and sifts down through muddy pond-water,
Settling in small beads around weeds and sunken branches,
And one crab, tentative, hunches himself before moving along the bottom,
Grotesque, awkward, his extended eyes looking at nothing in particular,
Only a few bubbles loosening from the ill-matched tentacles,

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The tail and smaller legs slipping and sliding slowly backward—
So the spirit tries for another life,
Another way and place in which to continue;
Or a salmon, tired, moving up a shallow stream,
Nudges into a back-eddy, a sandy inlet,
Bumping against sticks and bottom-stones, then swinging
Around, back into the tiny maincurrent, the rush of brownish-white water,
Still swimming forward—
So, I suppose, the spirit journeys.

Or, if you will not be convinced, I will quote something that comes down like a landslide, a passage on the life of the average family, from the Fourth Meditation:

I think of the self-involved:
The ritualists of the mirror, the lonely drinkers,
The minions of benzedrine and paraldehyde,
And those who submerge themselves deliberately in trivia,
Women who become their possessions,
Shapes stiffening into metal,
Match-makers, arrangers of picnics—
What do their lives mean,
And the lives of their children—
The young, brow-beaten early into a baleful silence,
Frozen by a father's lip, a mother's failure to answer.
Have they seen, ever, the sharp bones of the poor
Or known, once, the soul's authentic hunger,
Those cat-like immaculate creatures
For whom the world works?

Crushing as that is, think of the powers which it suggests are still on the way, about to be achieved.

Unlike Roethke, William Carlos Williams,[2] in spite of his long involvement with the *avant garde*, has never been one to learn from literary movements and excitements. Since the first forming of his mature style, changes have come about in that style chiefly because of the events in his life. He is perhaps chief of those (like Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore) whom the prospect of old age and the awareness of death as a reality have shocked into a new poetic life.

This change, oddly enough, usually involved a shift toward conventional poetry—a shift away from experimental techniques and a concern with style as such, toward a more intense concern with subject. No one would deny, I think, the full success of the best poems in Williams' last volumes: "The Descent," "To Daphne and Virginia," "The Host," and, especially, "Of Asphodel." I hope that no one would deny, either, that a tremendous change in style has made these poems possible, and that this change has been toward conventional English poetry:

[2] PATERSON, FIVE, by *William Carlos Williams*. New Directions. $3.00.

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Of asphodel, that greeny flower,
like a buttercup
upon its branching stem—
save that it's green and wooden—
I come, my sweet,
to sing to you.
We lived long together
a life filled,
if you will,
with flowers.

I would not suggest that this comes about through any willingness on Williams' part—if you talk to him, he is as full of theories as ever. It is just that when he approached this poem, he found a subject, his love for his wife, which was so important to him and about which he had so many things which *had* to be said, that he stopped being a rather academic theorizer on the nature of poetic language and said what he had to get said, in whatever way he could get it said.

One can only be grateful for this late blossoming of Williams'; I would hardly maintain that *Paterson, Five* is a major part of this renaissance. It is, on the whole, a weaker performance. Still, it has real virtues: a firm translation from Sappho, an affectionate letter from Josephine Herbst, a good description and meditation upon the Unicorn tapestries, and many passages of clear, clean writing which anyone might envy:

A flight of birds, all together,
seeking their nests in the season
a flock before dawn, small birds
"That slepen al the night with open Yë,"
moved by desire, passionately, they
have come a long way, commonly.
Now they separate and go by pairs
each to his appointed mating. The
colors of their plumage are undecipherable
in the sun's glare against the sky
but the old man's mind is stirred
by the white, the yellow, the black
as if he could see them there.

Their presence in the air again
calms him. Though he is approaching
death he is possessed by many poems.
Flowers have always been his friends,
even in paintings and tapestries . . .

How much would you have? Again, Williams' style has always required a certain unevenness of performance. The liveliness of his mind and method have always demanded the freedom to be wrong, pigheaded, pompous, even loud-mouthed—anything but correct and half-dead.

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It has obviously paid off for him, both as a person and as a poet. His good work is so extremely powerful that it has made his weaker work worth reading, if only to know more, even the weaknesses, even the follies, of so generous a mind.

Cummings,[3] unlike either Williams or Roethke, has been influenced neither by literary movements nor by the events of his life. Neither his style nor his metaphysic has undergone any essential change since *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923). Not to have changed one's mind or one's personality since the age of twenty-two gives one a certain monolithic grandeur; it may also give a certain sense of arrested development. At any rate, it demands that Cummings (unlike Williams or Roethke who can change their minds) must be right all the time. Thus, old age and the approach of death should not be able to teach him much, which seems a shame. Yet it has always been a major tenet of Cummings' belief that you must be aware of death, accept it, make it a part of your life. Unless he should decide that his early beliefs did not suffice, he has no place to go; the natural business of old age (learning to accept the loss of physical vigor and to die) has long been taken care of.

His poetry has undergone a general weakening; he has known his answers too long for his voice to keep its impulsion. *95 Poems* has, of course, enough good poems in it for a lesser poet. Not enough for Cummings. At one time, every poem he published would reward at least one reading. Even the unfinished sketches from his earlier books offered vital twists of language and image, something seminal. Now the old stylistic devices are being reworked too often; Cummings is actually becoming as sentimental as unfriendly critics accused him of being; the virtues of the book slip in almost accidentally, when Cummings is looking the other way. It used to be that when he wound up his Sunday punch, made the big effort, something big resulted. Consider that wonderful early (and much neglected) metaphysical poem, "gee, i like to think of dead . . . " or the later "my father moved through dooms of love." In this new volume, it is precisely the major efforts which fail, like "i am a little church (no great cathedral)" which is sentimental and orotund, or "Thanksgiving 1956" which is full of a childish rage whose only real purpose is self-justification. The best poems here are those little ones where the poet seems, almost accidentally, to have stepped for the moment outside the confines of his usual beliefs:

old age sticks
up Keep
Off
signs) &

youth yanks them
down (old
age
cries No

[3] 95 POEMS, by *E. E. Cummings*. Harcourt, Brace. $4.00.

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Tres) & (pas)
youth laughs
(sing
old age

scolds Forbid
den Stop
Must
n't Don't

&) youth goes
right on
gr
owing old

I suppose I would admire this book had it been written by anyone of lesser capabilities. Yet Cummings once copied out, from Eric Newman's *The Meaning of Beauty*, this sentence: "It is not the arrival but the journey that counts." It would be too saddening if he, of all people, should become like those people he has always attacked—frozen in his attitudes, trapped in his beliefs.

Charles Norman's biography of Cummings[4] (from which some of the above information comes) has exactly those virtues, and those faults, which one should expect in the biography of a man's close friend. It will undoubtedly become a standard source on Cummings—at the moment, it is nearly the only one.

First of all, the book does provide a great deal of valuable information, much of it not (to my knowledge) available elsewhere. There is, for instance, a considerable section devoted to the life of Cummings' family in Cambridge, Mass. There is also a full, round account of the events leading to Cummings' arrest in France and so to the writing of *The Enormous Room*. Norman has, especially, a good deal of information about the plays *Him* and *Santa Claus* and a number of very important suggestions about how they should be understood. For instance, I have always been puzzled by the lightning rods worn by the fairies in Act II, Scene 8 of *Him*. I once thought, bumblingly enough, that this might relate to the effeminate Prometheus who wore a lightning rod in a performance I had seen of Aristophanes' *The Birds*; of course, the Greeks didn't have lightning rods and, besides, it didn't seem right to equate homosexuals with Prometheans, even those of Aristophanes. I discover from Norman that this scene relates to quite another aspect of Aristophanes—mockery of the weaknesses and misfortunes of specific persons—Bert Savoy, the comic female impersonator, a homosexual, had recently been struck and killed by lightning. This at least helps a reader know what sorts of meaning he must be alert for.

Again, the book makes a number of compelling hints about the relation between these plays and Cummings' relationship to his wives. These hints,

[4] THE MAGIC MAKER: E. E. CUMMINGS, by *Charles Norman*. Macmillan. $8.00.

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however, go only so far as a friend can go. In the end, their combination of reticence and extreme suggestiveness is a little like a Broadway song; an "innocent" hint can lead the mind through much more slime than a blunt statement can. Further, the book fails, at many crucial points, to give the most basic factual information. One simply begins to wonder how Cummings lived with his wives, what they were like, why he didn't get along with them, how did he earn his living and keep alive? A friend may feel it improper to reveal such matters, yet they certainly shouldn't be left for enemies.

Finally, there is nothing in the book which would displease Cummings. The clear aim is: praise, praise, praise. On page 264, Norman writes, "(In writing about art, and particularly the art of others, Cummings is much more impressive, or effective, than when he is writing about himself as a combination poet and painter.)" This parenthesis, and perhaps two other sentences like it, are as far from adulation as he manages to get. He wastes, for instance, a great deal of time quoting early reviews of Cummings' work and sniggering at them. Who, if he had to stand trial for esthetic snap-judgments of twenty years ago, would escape hanging? Then, too, Norman always assumes that if he points out Cummings' intentions in some work of art, this will insure the reader's enthusiasm for the work. This is hardly the case. For instance, after reading Norman I am more aware of the function of the typography in this poem:

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s)
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iness

but I am not convinced that the poem is more than a sort of obsessive doodling.

Enough. No doubt I am disappointed because I wanted a stronger esthetic analysis or perhaps a (much overdue) exploration of Cummings' metaphysic so as to be better armed against those who do not share my admiration for much of Cummings' work. This book has its strengths. One of these, incidentally, is a good selection of photographs, including a truly lovely picture of Cummings with his third and present wife, Marion Morehouse.

Finally, I. A. Richards' book.[5] I hear complaints of how gnarled and difficult these poems are; one friend said that every time he tried to open

[5] GOODBYE EARTH AND OTHER POEMS, by *I. A. Richards*. Harcourt, Brace. $3.75.

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the book he would bark his knuckles on one of the poems. Elsewhere, I hear comparisons to Empson. I cannot agree. Obviously, many of these poems are very difficult, too difficult; those are not the poems for which the book will be remembered. The best poems—and there are enough of them—are graceful, elegant, and perhaps the least "obscure" poems written by any serious poet around. Except for the single villanelle, "To Dumb Forgetfulness," Richard shows little similarity to Empson. Even the obscurities of the two poets are dissimilar. Richards' obscurities occur in the syntax which twists itself, sometimes, like a small clear stream weaving about among the trees and boulders; at moments one loses it in the underbrush, yet its overall aim and tendency is clear enough. Richards has neither Empson's brilliancies and stark terrors, nor his forced rhymes and occasional lapses of taste.

I suppose people have been thrown off by the notes at the back of the book. The most I can say of them is that they do not often lead one astray (whether intentionally or through failure to understand the poem) and that they sometimes have a splendid dead-pan comicality.

From whom, then, has Richards (who has taught most of us directly or indirectly)—from whom has Richards learned? If his former student Empson did not, then who *did* influence him? I cannot say; perhaps someone more widely read would know. Clearly he has read Hardy and Graves; closely. And much children's poetry. Perhaps Ransom is the only poet now on the scene who would have found nerve for "The Solitary Daffodil":

From committee-doodled day
Beckon'd by the cocktail roar,
Feeling for what seemed a way,
I groped, as I had groped before.
A vivid Presence in the grass
Held me up. I could not pass.

A solitary Daffodil!
Its candid countenance was there
Speaking of the end of ill
With mild, confiding, tranquil air:
Its crisp, translucent whorls so pure
I grew as sure as it was sure.

Through golden depths on on *it spoke,*
A little Trumpet, grave and deep,
And nodded lightly as it woke
The world from transcendental sleep.
Alone it had been waiting there
A Herald and a Harbinger.

So, as a lost word found can say
The never-so-well-known-before,
It welcomed me into a Day
And almost opened me a Door

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Through which I may still step to be
In recollected Company.

I don't recall such delicious and delicate humor since "Piazza Piece." Thank God, solitary daffodils are back!

Plainly, Richards has learned much from the events of his life and has not hesitated to write about them. Robert Lowell has remarked that all these poems have the very uncommon virtue of "being about something" —about old age, retirement, teaching at Harvard, preparing for death, love in old age, poetry in old age, the temptation to throw your life away. The best of these poems—"Lighting Fires in Snow," "The Solitary Daffodil," "Forfeits," "Harvard Yard in April," "Magnolia Hour," "Trinity Brethren Attend," and "Dismission"—these poems suggest that he is one of the most promising younger poets. After his Dismission:

Farewell, young Muse! you've teased me long enough,
Promising lines and rimes you didn't furnish.
You claimed you had some public's ear as well.
You've pestered me to clip and file and burnish
But rust adorns, I find, and dust's the stuff.

You've lectured me on What and How and Why
Until there's not a theme I care to touch.
Artful and heartless, innocent and sly
Go decorate some other poet's couch
Now all is almost over. Here! Goodbye!

Go wrench his sense and regulate his voice.
Tell him there's nothing left for verse to say
Though only you can find the way to say it.
Give him my greeting with your rates of pay
And never let him know he has no choice.

—one can only hope that she will reply as she usually does to such bravado, will simply recline once more upon that delicate Victorian finger-roll couch (such as you see in Rousseau's "The Dream" or in Ivor Richards' livingroom) and will never let him know he has no choice.

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NORTHROP FRYE

Interior Monologue of M. Teste

THE SECOND VOLUME of a projected complete translation of Paul Valéry in the Bollingen Series is a collection of Valéry's essays on the theory of criticism.[1] In any such collection there is bound to be a good deal of repetition, but it is instructive to see how few ideas Valéry really had on the subject. The earliest essay, dated 1889, checks off the standard objects of *symboliste* devotion like beads on a rosary: the "extremely original theory of Edgar Poe," the leitmotiv in Wagner, the symbol (referred to as vaguely as possible), the analogy of music, the technique of oblique suggestion. Even what sounds more distinctive of Valéry, the remark that the poet "is a cool scientist, almost an algebraist, in the service of a subtle dreamer," is reconstructed from Poe, who did his subtle dreaming in "The Raven" and his algebra in *The Philosophy of Composition*. The latest essay is the preface to the translation of Virgil's Eclogues, done in the year of the poet's death in 1945. But the form of the present book is, somewhat accidentally, one of Valéry's favorite forms: variations on a single theme.

There are traditionally two main centers of emphasis in the theory of criticism, sometimes described by the words *poesis* and *poema*. The former, or Longinian, center is primarily an interest in the psychological process of poetry, and in the rhetorical relation (often arrived at by indirection) set up between poet and reader. The latter, or Aristotelian, center is primarily an interest in the aesthetic product, and is based on a specific aesthetic judgment, detached by catharsis from moral anxieties and emotional perturbations. Any complete theory of criticism needs both, but in a complete theory the aesthetic judgment takes precedence, for the Longinian interest is in enthusiasm, or what "carries us away," in other words in what uncritical feelings we may trust to afterwards. Europa needs to know whether the agent of her rapture is a god in disguise or merely a remarkably undiscriminating brute. Of course scholarship, in its turn, has priority over judgment, but that is not our concern here.

Valéry is a Longinian critic, concerned with the poetic process. As T. S. Eliot points out in his very useful introduction, he has no sustained theoretical interest in any poetry except his own, not because he is egocentric, but because he is the only poet whose processes he can watch. And as he is a very good poet, the prior aesthetic judgment is taken care of. The book has a typically Longinian opening: Valéry begins, not, like Aristotle, with what poetry is and what species it has, but with the reader in a receptive mood. There are two contexts, he tells us, to which the term poetry belongs. One is the context of the "poetic," a vague sense, in the mind of the reader, of the enormous significance that could be given to words and of their power, when properly handled, of expressing the

[1] THE ART OF POETRY, by *Paul Valéry*, translated by *Denise Folliot*, with an introduction by *T. S. Eliot*. Bollingen Series XLV. 71. Pantheon Books. $3.50.

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reader's feelings. The other is poetry in the technical sense, as the specific supply to this general demand. The better the poem, the more precisely and inevitably it expresses the inarticulate need for articulation.

Longinian too is Valéry's conception of inspiration as meaning, not a state of mind that the poet is in, but a state of mind that he induces in his reader. The reader feels permeated with a sense of significance not coming from himself, so he projects this on the poet, and assumes that the poet is a kind of medium for some hypothetical creative spirit. But while it is true that "poetry and the arts have sensibility as beginning and end," the process of creating it may involve any amount of purely conscious and voluntary effort, as in revision or the following out of a complex metrical form. It is probably an advantage to a medium to be slightly stupid, but it is difficult to see what advantage stupidity can be to a poet, or what use the uncritical inhaling of some kind of oracular nitrous oxide would be to someone who has to work out a sestina or a canzone. There are superficial resemblances between the poem and the dream, but the poet and the dreamer are even more distinct for Valéry than for Keats: nobody is so wide awake or consciously alert as the person who has to *observe* a dream.

While Valéry is primarily concerned with the theoretical element in poetry, he is not, like Longinus, concerned with direct rhetoric or oratory, but with its opposite, the indirect disinterested rhetoric of verbal elaboration. Whenever we read anything we find our attention moving in two directions at once. One direction is outward, from the words themselves to their remembered conventional meanings. The other is inward, and is directed toward building up a unified apprehension of the structure of words itself. Where the outward direction is the primary one, we have signal language. Here words are used for the sake of what they mean, and when the meaning is grasped there is no further need for the words. Meaning here, Valéry says, results from the "rapid passage over words," like a hand passed quickly through a flame. "Shut the door": as soon as the door is shut, the words vanish, having fulfilled their function. Even a long book, if written simply to give information, survives only as a convenience of reference, or until it is superseded by fuller information.

But where the inward direction is the primary one, we have poetry, a structure of words made for its own sake. Poetry does not tend to disappear when its meaning is grasped, but to repeat itself in the same form, whereas repetition in signal language merely means a failure in response. (E.g.: "Shut the door." "What's that?" "I said, shut the door.") The difference between poetic and signal language may be compared to the difference between dancing and walking. Walking is purposeful, and its end or fulfilment is determined externally, when we get to where we're going. Dancing is movement for its own sake, and its end is determined only by the logic of its form.

The presence of signal meaning in words makes poetry an unusually complex art. In music, for example, there is no signal meaning at all, or if there is nobody understands it. The chord of C major does not "mean" anything except in a musical context, and "program" music is mainly

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humorous in reference, the source of the humor being precisely the ineptness of music for descriptive meaning. Music, or the world of significant sound, turns its back sharply on the world of aural impressions, or noise. A noise in the middle of a concert, or the sound of a violin in a city street, is an interruption from another order of things. Similarly mathematics, considered as an art, gets along with a minimum of signal meaning. The conception *pi* does not mean anything except another mathematical formulation of it. In ordinary experience the shortest distance between two points may not be a straight line, as the shortest way to get to the other side of a wall is around by the door, but geometry knows nothing of such existential untidiness.

The poet, however, has to use the same dissolving words that we use for ordinary speech, where we are attending not to them but to what they point to. "Shut the door" is signal language, and in one of the most terrifying moments in literature, the close of the second act of *King Lear*, the operative phrase is only "shut up your doors." It is almost as though the art of painting consisted in making collages out of old dollar bills. One has to make a special conscious effort to recognize, in poetry, a significant and organized world of words ("poetic universe," as Valéry calls it) corresponding to the world of significant sound in music or significant measurement in mathematics. Hence poetry is esoteric, in the sense that poetic meaning is a contrast to ordinary or signal verbal meaning. It is no more esoteric than music or mathematics, but the necessity of discarding our accustomed habits of response to words in poetry creates a peculiar psychological barrier.

The distinction between inward and outward meaning, and its corollary, that verbal structures can be divided into those made for their own sake and those made to serve other purposes, is, almost certainly, the basis of all practical criticism. It is, however, a distinction between the literary and the non-literary verbal structure. Having made the distinction, Valéry muddles it again by calling the literary structure "poetry" and the non-literary one "prose," thus confusing it with the technical distinction in rhythm between prose and verse. But while it is true that prose is, unlike verse, used for non-literary purposes, the enormous bulk of literary prose makes nonsense of any attempt to equate prose with the extra-literary. (One may add for completeness, though the point is of minor importance, that non-literary verse is also possible, as in mnemonic rhymes of the "Thirty days hath September" type.) Valéry is often forced by his own confusion of terms to treat literary prose as something to be explained away. True, he does not particularly like prose, and his references even to Flaubert and Proust are somewhat disparaging. In the most systematic statement of his theory, the essay called "Remarks on Poetry," he draws a distinction between the pure poetic universe and the mimesis of actual life in prose fiction that illustrates the essential affinity of prose with signal language. But his statements would apply equally well to many other genres.

The basis of Valéry's theory is in Poe: it would be difficult to get closer to

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Poe than Valéry does when he says: "What we call a *poem* is in practice composed of fragments of pure poetry embedded in the substance of a discourse." This means among other things that the difficult part of writing a poem of any length is the problem of poetic continuity. Poetic necessity, he says, can reside only in form, and "form demands a continuity of felicitous expression." But, like Poe, Valéry regards the standard narrative and didactic conventions of continuity as non-poetic. Of Lucretius he remarks that the attention given to following the ideas competes with the attention given to the poetry, and that "the *De Rerum Natura* is here in conflict with the nature of things." He reverts over and over to the limited degree of tolerance that poetry has for conceptual language, to the equal importance of sound and sense in the poetic process, to the necessity of subordinating thought in poetry. "An intimate alliance of sound and sense . . . can be obtained only at the expense of something—that is, thought." The poetic process of putting words into patterns can never coincide entirely with the conceptual process of putting ideas into words.

No one could agree less than Valéry would with Kafka's remark that writing is an art of causality. "The sequence of our feelings has no longer a chronological order, but a kind of intrinsic, instantaneous order, which is revealed step by step." A causal or sequential writer, such as a novelist, is faced with a Leibnitzian problem of making actual the best of a number of possibilities, but Valéry tells us that when he reads continuous prose he tends to reconstruct some of the other possibilities. For an Aristotelian critic tragedy is often the central form of poetic experience, but Valéry's remarks on tragedy are aimless and uncomprehending, and end in the reflection that "the tragic genre is completely opposed to producing in the soul the most elevated state that art can create there: the contemplative state." Similarly with narrative: he speaks of "the prosiness, even the platitudes, inevitable when any story is put into verse," and, in his delightful essay on La Fontaine's *Adonis*, he sums up his whole attitude by saying: "in poetry everything which *must* be said is almost impossible to say well." Valéry is, as we have noticed, deeply concerned with the reader, and feels that what has value only for oneself has no value. But he will have nothing to do with persuasive or confronting rhetoric: he abhors all forms of proselytism, and considers it rather vulgar even to be "right" in any difference of opinion.

We soon realize that by "poetry" Valéry means his own kind of poetry, that is, *symbolisme*, and what *symbolisme* is able to absorb from the poetic tradition in general. The germ of truth in this identification is the fact that the different genres of literature may (up to a point) be arranged in the order of their distance from signal meaning. Literary prose is relatively close to it; narrative and didactic verse within sight of it; but *symbolisme* stands at the greatest possible distance from it, and does its best to turn its back on it. But, as with all selective traditions, even *symbolisme* breaks down, or up, into a group of conflicting heresies. The tradition of Laforgue and Corbière, from which Eliot derives, is, as Eliot points out, quite different; so is the disintegrative tradition that derives from Rimbaud and

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Jarry. Valéry as critic is simply the disciple of Mallarmé (his relation to Poe is through Mallarmé), and it is Mallarmé's great idea of the poetic universe (*le Verbe*) that informs all his criticism.

As the poetic universe, toward which the poet turns, is in the opposite direction from the market-place, it would be convenient if there were an absolute "poetic diction," a language peculiar to poetry and used only for it, as there is a language of sounds used only in music. "All literature which has passed a certain age reveals a tendency to create a poetic language apart from ordinary speech." For poetic language ought to be "the language of the gods," or at least a language of magic or charm, spoken only within a spellbound closed circle. Such poetic diction as we have, however, falls very far short of being a "Paradise of Language," and so various correlatives or equivalents for a separate language emerge. Among these are the conventions of form, such as the sonnet and the chant royal, or the rules governing the rhyming and cadencing of alexandrines. There is a theory of games in poetry as there is in economics, and poetry, like chess, makes a virtue of arbitrary rules, or at least of "considered arbitrariness." Such rules have the great virtue of interfering with the half-automatic flow of "natural" or non-poetic speech.

Poetry as close to verbal organization and as far from signal meaning as possible is what Valéry means by "pure poetry." As long as words are employed in poetry at all, of course, pure poetry cannot exist, except as an ideal. But its ideal existence is very important, for it means that the creative activity of the poet is not hitched to his ego. The poet uses all the resources of skill and intelligence in the interests of an impossible demand for integrity, not in the interests of self-expression. The pure poem is really the perfect poem, and "Perfection eliminates the person of the author." The minor artist impresses us as a sensitive and cultivated person; the major artist is simply speaking with the voice of his art.

When we hear a musical sound in the middle of ordinary noise, we hear something that reminds us, not of any specific piece of music, but of music itself and the whole range of its possibilities. That is why Valéry speaks of the "musical universe." Every poem, similarly, is a manifestation of poetry, or a total order of words. As Valéry remarks in a patriotic address, it is obvious that the greatest French poet is France, "I make one mighty poet from all our poets, forming a single being," he says in the same context. The sense that the background of every poem is the whole order of poetic experience is constantly present in Valéry, but is nowhere developed, partly because Valéry's sense of tradition is so limited. Consequently the question of poetic meaning, of the poem's significance, not in terms of ordinary meaning, but as a phase of poetic experience, is left in the air.

The relation of a poem to poetry as a whole raises the question of the structural principles of poetry, and in particular the problems of convention and genre. Valéry largely ignores the problem of genre, and is curiously selective in his approach to convention. Conventions of external form and of meter he accepts; conventions of narrative and of poetic concepts (*topoi*) he rejects out of hand; conventions of theme and imagery leave

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him with nothing to say, although he observes them in practice. He speaks of the content of a poem as its myth, and *Le Cimetière Marin* and *La Jeune Parque* are clearly mythopoeic poems, and conventionally mythopoeic at that. Yet he seems to have no interest in discussing their myths or images—in short, he is not concerned to give any suggestion of what these very difficult poems are about. His attitude to a critical explication of *Le Cimetière Marin* by someone else is one of delighted surprise that a poem of his should really have meant all that.

We naturally feel that it is not a poet's business to explain what his poems mean, even granting that "meaning" here is poetic meaning, or structural analysis. But the fact that we feel this way is significant in determining the role of the poet as critic. Valéry takes a rather sardonic view of the academic study of literature, and writes with much pungency about its unreality, the pointlessness of all the "interpretations" of poets that cancel each other out. As he says: "these simulacra of thoughts take on a kind of existence and provide reason and substance for a mass of combinations of a certain scholarly originality. A Boileau is thus ingeniously discovered in Victor Hugo, a romantic in Corneille, a 'psychologist' or a realist in Racine. All these things are neither true nor false—in fact they could not possibly be either." The inference is that it is the poets themselves who are the trustworthy critics: of Victor Hugo Valéry makes the unlikely remark that "Hugo, like all true poets, is a critic of the first rank."

Yet if the present volume proves anything, it proves that all a poet can do as critic is to tell us those things of which he has special knowledge, and which belong to autobiography rather than criticism. Meaning in poetry, like inspiration, is a conception that relates primarily to the reader, not the writer. In the kind of poetry that Valéry writes this means a highly trained or critical reader. For Valéry's is a post-Kantian type of poetry in which the theme or organizing form of the poem remains invisible to the poet himself, and everything in the poem is an epiphany or manifestation of some aspect of it. The poet himself knows that everything he has written belongs in his poem; he does not necessarily know why. If we are to take Valéry seriously as a poet, we cannot afford to take him too seriously as a critic.

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MARIUS BEWLEY

The Open Form

NEAR THE END of Mr. Robert Martin Adams's very interesting new book,[1] he makes a comment that will perhaps provide a convenient entry into the character of this volume: "Once alerted to the concept of ambivalence (which is, on a small scale, very much what openness is on a large one), what incredible trophies have not the devoted critics produced! One naturally hesitates to propose another such game of hare and hounds—especially when the hare is, once again, an exceedingly ill-defined animal." I presume Mr. Adams is using "ambivalence" here synonomously with ambiguity. The first edition of Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* appeared in 1930 in a relatively unflourishing critical landscape, the character of which it dramatically helped to change, until "ambivalences" were indeed in serious danger of becoming pests. It is unlikely that any new critical term or concept could be brought forward at the present time with anything like comparable effect. Since then the critical audience has grown both too sophisticated and too bored to allow the earlier response to be duplicated. But Mr. Adams's backward reference to that ancient season when the critical strategy of tracking ambiguities first appeared on the English Cambridge scene underscores certain qualities in his own book.

In some respects it is possible to think of "literary openness" as a similar strategy, but there are qualifying differences, in understanding which we shall arrive more exactly at a just idea of what Mr. Adams has attempted to do, and how far he has succeeded. "Literary openness" is an original verbal coinage of Mr. Adams, and a useful one; but its meaning hardly constitutes a genuinely new and radical enlargement of our critical awareness in the sense in which this had been true of Empsonian ambiguity. Its value, as I shall try to show later, lies in an altogether different area. As a critical term it seems to be an externally descriptive phrase which opens no new realms of meaning by virtue of its own intrinsic nature. The sensitive insights into particular literary works with which Mr. Adams fills his book could have been arrived at, for the most part, in terms of a different vocabulary, which is not often true of the analyses in Empson's *Seven Types*. To take three examples more or less at random, Mr. Adams gives us a very good analysis of *Le Misanthrope*, that very odd play which seems to have no genuine resolution and to end in an impasse. "Literary openness" is a satisfactory concept here for arriving at certain conclusions about the play, and they are undoubtedly true and important conclusions; but without the aid of the term, Mr. Martin Turnell in *The Classical Moment* arrived at conclusions which, if I am not mistaken, are substantially identical. Similarly, Mr. R. P. Blackmur, using "expressive form," has been able to describe D. H. Lawrence's genius and limitations in a way

[1] STRAINS OF DISCORD: STUDIES IN LITERARY OPENNESS, by *Robert Martin Adams*. Cornell University Press. $3.75.

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that closely corresponds to Mr. Adams's description of him as an example of "modern romantic openness." Finally, both Mr. Adams and Mr. Empson have, each in terms of his respective strategy, nearly identical things to say about Crashaw's repellent epigram beginning, "Suppose he had been tabled at thy Teates."

My point here is not to minimize the value of Mr. Adams's book, nor the usefulness of "literary openness," but to clear the ground towards determining just where its value lies. His book is tightly organized around this centrally placed term, which, in the context given it, appears to possess an intrinsic virtue and tightness that is actually grounded in his own perceptiveness as a practical critic. The excellence of most critical terms resides in the intelligence and sensitivity of the man who uses them. Like the famous Anglo-Saxon swallow, they fly from the darkness and pause for a moment only before the firelight of critical relevance, to disappear then into the outer storm. In an attempt to detain them too long, the critic may spread the library shelves with birdlime and only succeed in ruining the books. But Mr. Adams is a good critic, and aware that "literary openness" is capable of an almost paralyzing breadth of application, he never pushes it beyond its endurance. Nevertheless, because of the spotlighted role the term occupies here, it is well for the reader to bear in mind the limits and dangers which press in towards any critical term when used with a good deal of frequency.

"Literary openness" carries an unexpected value for the present state of "theoretical" criticism which I want to discuss in some detail. But although the term is nearly self-explanatory, it would be well to clarify first exactly what Mr. Adams means by it. If it is a very simple term, it is at the same time capable of graduating complexities as it is applied to increasingly complex art. He defines it most simply in his opening chapter: "The open form is literary form (a structure of meanings, intents, and emphases, i.e., verbal gestures) which includes a major unresolved conflict with the intent of displaying its unresolvedness." The first two analyses of "open" and "closed" structure he gives us deal with *Oedipus Rex* (closed form) and *The Bacchae* (open form). He summarizes the difference as "simply that between a work which, by resolving its problems, leaves the audience in a state of psychological repose, emptied of passion, and one which, by failing or refusing to resolve its given problems, leaves the audience in a state of psychological tension, of unrelieved anguish." From such a description it is immediately obvious that open form will be congenial to periods of conflict and irresolution, such as our own or the seventeenth century, whereas closed structure will be favoured in a period in which the intellectual frame of society is seen as solidly supporting the predominant assumptions.

But if "literary openness" seems a descriptive phrase rather than a new *de facto* critical concept, it shows an inherent bias that is all to the good at present. Its tendency is towards evolving a genuine unity from, on the one hand, the meaning of the work of art, and the verbal structure on the other. It moves away from the current fashion of sundering the two—of

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granting autonomy to words while repealing their humanistic content. Matthew Arnold's description of poetry as a criticism of life, which remains as good a definition of literary function as is ever likely to be achieved in so brief a formula, is no longer popular. One of the reasons lies in the bent of some contemporary criticism which deplores an explicit nexus between the work of art and objective experience. The poem's subject in such a view is only itself. The Arnoldian conception is seen as reducing art to the level of mirror-image imitation, and confining its effects to the didactic and descriptive. Our contemporary concern to ground the life of the poem in its own verbal being is entirely admirable, but it is not incommensurate with Arnold's conception of the relevance of poetry to life. Rather, it can provide an enrichening qualification and enlargement of our understanding of the Arnoldian phrase. But in recent practice these two conceptions often seem to cancel each other out.

Mr. Northrop Frye, whose *Anatomy of Criticism* is among the more illuminating discussions of the subject, writes: " . . . a poem's meaning is literally its pattern of integrity as a verbal structure. Its words cannot be separated and attached to sign values: all possible sign values of a word are absorbed into a social complexity of verbal relationships." And he goes on to make a more extreme statement: " . . . a poet's intention is centripetally directed. It is directed towards putting words together, not towards aligning words with meaning." As still another critic has put it, the contemporary tendency is towards intellectual suicide, the discovery of the meaninglessness of meaning. This sinister autonomy of the word, this absolute impersonality of art, can be chilling if taken too literally. It is reminiscent of that interplanetary classic in which fantastic machines on a dead planet continue operating and refueling themselves for untold millennia after life has disappeared. But in Mr. Frye's own context this is not so, for: "The work of imagination presents us with a vision, not of the personal greatness of the poet, but of something impersonal and far greater: the vision of a decisive act of spiritual freedom, the vision of the recreation of man."

There is an imperative need for good practical criticism today that will bridge the apparent gap between Arnold's conception of poetry as criticism of life, and our own undue emphasis on poetry as a verbal structure unrelated to life. As the last quotation from Mr. Frye indicates, there is nothing essentially anomalous in the idea of such a reconciliation, and Mr. Adams's book is a valuable contribution towards such a body of criticism. The title is itself suggestive, for if the effectiveness of the poetry likely to be most congenial to contemporary readers seems to depend on internal tensions and strains ending in various kinds of unresolvedness, this attractive dissonance is, and must be, ultimately grounded in our own unfocussed time. If Mr. Adams is primarily concerned with verbal structure he does not see it as separable from its social context or the creative personality. Structural discord has meaning only because of the human discord from which it derives significant life, and his criticism continuously swings between these two poles.

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In what is perhaps his best chapter, "Metaphysical Poets, Ancient and Modern," he shows how seventeenth century English metaphysical poetry is the result of internal stresses arising from the disintegration of an analogically conceived universe. " 'Wit', which in its early meanings is not often far removed from general intellectual energy, was conceived of as doing its best to hold this elaborate structure together, extending it through unexpected and daring lines of thought or reinforcing it in surprising ways." Where the strategy of wit is compelled to adopt such eccentric devices to perform a function so essentially structural, the creative mind will inevitably be forced back into a self-regarding gaze, and most readers will be aware, I think, of how insistently Donne's mind, as active protagonist, holds the spotlight in most of his poems at the expense of whatever his ostensible subject may be. Speaking of the famous comparison between separated lovers and the legs of a compass, Mr. Adams shows how the verbal structure achieves effectiveness only in terms of the intellectual narcissism of Donne's mind, caught in the act of theatrically posturing:

> The incongruities in this image are latent but nonetheless potent; for most of us, plane geometry does not have much to do with the feelings engendered by leaving a mistress. Indeed, there is no denying that these feelings find somewhat attenuated expression through the ingenuities of the image; grief which has leisure to work out the details of such extravagant metaphors is not, in any but the literary sense, "serious." The metaphor all but blocks out the subject it is ostensibly invoked to illuminate. It offers a resistance; and to the degree that it does so Donne undeniably intended to give an impression of himself as the mind in which a simile took shape.
>
> . . . He is not precisely saying, "Look what a curious fellow I am to be making this odd connection"; still, if there is any focus to the image at all it is on the mind that conceived and is to be imagined speaking it. In short, Donne is operating here very much after the manner of what a later age will call the dramatic monologue.

I am not concerned with this passage here as an example of "literary openness," but rather as a representative instance, culled from many possible examples in Mr. Adams's book, of the unobtrusive but effective way in which he reconciles verbal structure and humanistic content. Donne's "Valediction," with its peculiar system of internal tensions, is generated verbally from a narcissistically focussed intellectual activity that is itself an oblique comment on the cultural situation in which it occurs. From this point of view, "A Valediction" becomes criticism of life in a very real sense, but a criticism that makes its comment through the internal tensions, resistances, and relationships of the verbal structure, from which it now continues to be separated only by a logical distinction.

Fortunately, literary criticism that realizes this unity is not infrequent today, but unlike critical theory that advocates verbal autonomy, such criticism is not programmatically organized. "Literary openness," about which I had some delimiting things to say in the beginning, has great

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value in this respect, for it enables the contemporary reader, wandering irresolute between two Arnoldian worlds, one dead and one unborn, to *use* literature of a particular kind quite consciously as a means of self-discovery; for in understanding the literary work of fractured or open form, even as a verbal structure, the reader is in fact moving into a deeper understanding of his own internal divisiveness and spiritual malaise. In the concluding chapter of his book Mr. Adams is quite explicit. He writes that works in the open form

> . . . imply an image of man as an essentially divided and self-antagonistic creature. Although he may be ignorant of this fact at first, the work brings him to a closer realization of it; and to do so it must stand at once closer to the reader and further from its own actions or characters. Its proper effect always precludes simple identification between reader and character; an element of self-consciousness enters into the proper reaction to the work in open form.

Mr. Adams is scrupulous in acknowledging indebtedness, and on several occasions he owns his debt to Mr. Kenneth Burke's conception of a poem as a Symbolic Act. This "dramatistic" conception of a poem as an act on the part of the poet who incarnates it in words, and finally of the reader who rehearses it on the stage of his own response and experience, is highly suggestive. It could provide a means of bridging the gap between verbal structure and humanistic content (which relates perhaps to the ancient problem of explaining how mortal tissue and immortal spirit can interact). But as I once had occasion to write elsewhere, Mr. Burke is intensely interested in theory and hardly at all in practical criticism, and, in effect, his criticism tends to abstract the verbal structure into an Act that often appears to be ultimately divorced from words altogether. The idea of "literary openness" does not seek to escape from the verbal structure in this way; it focusses on it directly, but understands and evaluates it in the deepest humanistic perspectives. But perhaps this is only to say, after all, that Mr. Adams is a sensitive literary critic whose judgments on poetry are usually good.

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S. P. BOVIE

Ovid and Juvenal

HORACE GREGORY'S blank verse translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has been published in a handsome volume of nearly 500 pages with decorations by Zhenya Gay.[1] Here, poetry's influence on the fine arts visibly enhances the good texture of large, wide-margined pages embossed with Ovid's intoxicating verses. Bright images are tossed up like sculptured froth from Ovid's salt-charged hexameter sea: from the sensuously feathered and breasted harpy on the frontispiece—a welcome addition to any feast—past the disarmingly naive snout-licking swine crouched over the table of contents, on past the line-drawings preceding each of the 15 books of the poem, we are made pleasantly aware of Ovid's *formae, corpora, figurae*. Far removed though it is from anything significant in Ovid, the love-death of the two centaurs Cyllarus and Hylonome featured for Book XII and again on the black and gold dust jacket, provides a touching motiv. In general, the animals are best, naturally sensuous, and the choice of other subjects sometimes tenuously related to Ovid's narrative (a voluptuous Niobe!) does not diminish the impact of the illustrations whose creatures animate and embellish the text.

Gregory's blank verse makes for an easy, readable narrative, manages the delicate turns of transition smoothly and imparts strength to the dialogue, force to the soliloquies. The unwavering tone is quite well suited to Ovid's narrative, and although no match for the prodigious phrasing of the Latin, captures a good deal of the original sound, of its frequent fury, its consistent sheen:

> *Meanwhile the boy as though he were unseen*
> *Strolled the green turf and stepping near its waters*
> *Tested the rippling surface with his toes,*
> *Then dipped his feet and, charmed by flowing coolness*
> *Of the stream, stripped off his clothes; and when she saw*
> *Him naked, the girl was dazzled; her eyes shone*
> *With blazing blinding light that Phoebus' face*
> *Poured in a looking-glass, nor could she wait*
> *To hold him naked in her arms. Striking*
> *His arms against his sides, he leaped and dived*
> *Overhand stroke, into the pool; his glittering body*
> *Flashed and turned within clear waters, as if*
> *It were of ivory or of white lilies seen*
> *Through walls of glass.*

Such set passages as the dwelling place and features of Envy and of Famine, the House of Sleep and of Fame, come off well, as do such episodes as Deucalion and Pyrrha, Sol and Phaethon, Pyramus and Thisbe, Pyg-

[1] OVID'S METAMORPHOSES, a new version by *Horace Gregory*. Viking. $7.50.

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malion and his statue, Cyclops and Galatea.

Gregory has supplied an initial paragraph of comment on each book and said a word about Ovid's influence, e.g. on Shakespeare or Spenser, on the Italian baroque style of Bernini or the Renaissance mentality of Cellini, on modern psychology, literature and literary criticism. Like Zhenya Gay's drawings, these prefaces impel our thoughts in the direction of what the poem offers the modern reader. But like the drawings also, they are at times a bit too fancy and always arbitrary. Ovid's representation of Medea, for instance, is undermined by Gregory's exclusive emphasis on the spectacular witchery of Book VII, and perhaps even causes him to translate the passage ending with

video meliora proboque
deteriora sequor

by

Brace up, my darling.
Be yourself again: O if I could, I would,
But now against my will an unknown power
Has made me weak: heat [sic] sways me one way,
And my mind another: I see the wiser,
Yet I take the wrong.

And surely, odd references to Housman, Mithridates and Plutarch's Life of Caesar cannot embody an adequate comment on Book XV if they preclude all discussion of the speech of Pythagoras with its arguments for brotherhood and against brutality, its incandescent imagery of physical change and the permanence of spirit, and of devouring time and proudly resistant art, and of the "seasons" which are the "ages" of man. On the whole, however, these prefatory remarks are consistently stimulating, which is perhaps the best reason for wincing when they do not ring true.

In his general introduction, Gregory presents an admirable review of Ovid's life, work, historical background, and subsequent influence. The range of allusion, the care taken to consider the very things the reader most needs to know about, and the discriminating way Gregory has of bringing out what is too frequently overlooked (especially the matter of a dramatic monologue and soliloquy) make this introduction a model of enlightened criticism and artistic judgment.

Upon comparison with Rolfe Humphries' blank verse translation (Indiana, 1954, now in its third printing), it can be said that both Gregory and Humphries have gone directly to their Ovid and transformed him. They keep the fabulous stories moving, which is precisely what Ovid intended. Humphries' version is the more colloquial and free-wheeling, and his easy diction gives off a bourgeois jaunty hum that pleasingly mirrors the animated flow of the Latin. By turns he is clever, and funny, and sober and gripping. He is always direct and lucid. Gregory is rather more quiet and more tuneful, and beautifully accurate in description. Neither meets the formidable challenge of "the sweet witty soul" of Ovid with complete success, although Humphries' scrupulous clarity and colloquial manner

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can conduct more voltage from the high-tension lines of Ovid's verbal force. Until we have a Shakespeare to galvanize Pyramus and Thisbe (and magnetize them anew at the negative pole of Romeo and Juliet), or adapt the speech of Pythagoras, or dwell in exile and on the sweet uses of adversity (without letting the most capricious poet honest Ovid out of his sight for an instant)—or unless a Joyce crops up to remind us that Deucalion and Pyrrha might well have been astoneaged at the result of their boulder bowling—we can rest content with minor miracles.

For Ovid's poetic vision is not only a panorama of physical transformations; it is also a powerful lens for viewing the structure of spiritual change in man, for observing our own "miraculous psychology" (in Gregory's phrase). And just as the one set of actions has to be made visible through words of description, so the other must be heard in the actual words that orchestrate the music of the mind. Ovid's rhetoric is the casuistry of the human heart, and the greatest wonder of his writing is that the language he uses, and *all* of his well-practised figures of speech shock us into the recognition of truths about ourselves. His words play against themselves, opposing and balancing meanings, shifting nuances, racing toward a climax, grinding to a horrified halt; lashing out, then rippling back on themselves; speeding toward the ultimate feeling, only to arrive at its unconquerable truth. Gregory's turns of phrase are apt enough, but he remains more stolid and even obscure at times than Humphries. For instance, when Cupid as amoretto chooses his contrary arrows, Ovid writes

sagittifera prompsit duo tela pharetra
diversorum operum: fugat hoc, facit illud amorem;

This gets lost in Gregory's

There carefully he made a choice of arrows—
Two darts that were of opposite persuasion . . .

We can no longer hear what Ovid means. Or when Juno finds it increasingly tiresome to hear herself called sister *and* wife of Jove, she says

si sum regina Iovisque
et soror et coniunx, certe soror

and we can hear the exasperated emphasis (caught by Humphries here but not by Gregory). Gregory contributes two puns (not in the Latin) and does justice to many of the figures of speech. And it is perhaps unreasonable to expect any poet however proficient to conquer all the lovelorn language of Ovid's plighted victims. Still, this is the challenge Ovid flings down: words in action, tone, nuance, maneuverable phrasing; thought being refined by passion; that rhetoric defined by Yeats as the quarrel we have with ourselves out of which we make poetry. When Phoebus (Sol, not Apollo) sentences his son to death, the father cannot go back on his word, but can only hope that Phaethon will re-word his wish:

ne dubita, dabitur—Stygias iuravimus undas!—
quodcumque optaris. sed tu sapientius opta.

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Ovid lets us hear the experienced voice echoing hollowly against the bronze walls of the innocent son's heart.

Within the past four years at least four writers have seized the reins and soared across the firmament of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; like his aspiring contemporaries, Horace Gregory has again brought us great light from a radiant source.

Complaints. For so lavish a production as Viking has engineered, the numerous mistakes are distressing. Serious inconvenience results from the omission of line and subject headings from the running heads, where they should be for every reader who intends to make good use of the book. Without the line numbers the book is cumbersome, for all its fancy format. The mistakes involve at least 14 misspellings,[2] wrongly accented proper names, especially Ixion, Andromeda, Proserpina, genuine obscurities in meaning,[3] and wilful misconstructions and confusions. In the narrative of Book VIII the sexes of Baucis and Philemon are transposed (but restored in the Index). In Book XIII the debate scene loses a lot by (1) the failure to translate *arma viri fortis medios mittantur in hostis* as the climax of Ajax's delivery; (2) the mistaken identification of Pyrrhus; (3) the confusion of Palamedes with Philoctetes, especially when Palamedes is later extricated from his identity with the person exiled on Lemnos. The terminal transition to the debate from Book XII makes misstatements about Menelaus and Agamemnon and the armor of Achilles which seem to indicate that Gregory has not bothered to visualize the persons or grasp the issues involved in a very important set passage (the debate between Ajax and Achilles) with its marvelous casuistry of mind over body. In Book V we encounter bad English and misinformation à propos the restoration of Acrisius to the throne of Argos by Perseus.

Difficulties arise from Gregory's pronounced aversion to the definite article, e.g.: "Threshold waits / For you to step outside" and his equal insistence on including it with proper names, "the Achilles, the Aeneas," *et al;* and from the amazing number of bad line breaks, a constant technical problem confronting the translator which Humphries solves expertly, but Gregory chooses to disregard. All these mistakes could have been removed before publication and certainly should have been in view of the sophisticated aim of the Viking edition.

Gilbert Highet says "The Roman Juvenal was the greatest satiric poet who ever lived." He also says: "There are three questions we can ask about

[2] Pandrosos, Melicerta, Agenor, Pyreneus, Ilioneus, Cecrops, Ariadne's "threat" (!), "crutches," Cenaeum, Sigeum, Psamathe and Phocus (not Nereid and Proctus), Phantasos, Cebren, Mergus: pp. 48, 108, 117, 130, 155, 161, 210, (227—"soothed"?) 228, 243, 303, 309, 317, 320, 321.

[3] Obscurities: p. 155, 1.7—grammar?; p. 169 "He had four sons . . . ," p. 173 heat (or heart?); p. 207, l. 8; 210: Theseus did *not* rape Ariadne; 226 ff. Baucis and Philemon altered throughout—although the Latin clearly states the case, *pia Baucis*, etc.; Book X, comment: Pygmalion's self-love?; p. 278 overtranslation and consequent muffling of *ars adeo latet arte sua;* p. 326 House of Fame not clearly located; p. 380, ll. 6-8 mistranslated; p. 423 "the philosopher" might at least be identified; p. 447 Trojan fires, not virgins.

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any satirical writer: does he tell the truth? does he deal with important subjects? and is his work effective?" I will dispose of both sayings by congratulating Rolfe Humphries on his complete verse translation of the *Satires*.[4]

Juvenal is the sort of major composer who always writes in a minor key, who delights but never inspires us. Humphries' poetic temperament, occasionally ill at ease with the sustained asseverations of Virgil, happy, even frivolous when consorting with honest Ovid, is absolutely attuned to the horrific hexameters of Juvenal. And the modern reader can be doubly grateful, for thanks to Highet we have learned a great deal about Juvenal and begun to get on to him, and thanks to Humphries we can now read him from beginning to end.

There are not three questions to be asked of Juvenal but 16, for each poem is a thing in itself and rattling round inside that thing is the test of Juvenal's art. Here is a poet who informs us that "whatever men do" is his subject, that he cannot refrain from writing satire, who starts off by bursting out: I won't listen to this junk any longer—*Semper ego auditor tantum? numquam reponam?* He will therefore cultivate the bad habit of good writing, *scribendi cacoethes* (VII.52). He *won't* listen, he *will* sound off, the only alternative for a poet these days: *difficile est saturam non scribere* (I.30).

But what he writes is satires, not satire, not whole compositions so much as irrepressible lines animated by a pace, fueled by a diction, and emblazoned with an imagery that are uniquely rich and strange. Humphries matches the pace, mirrors the diction, transposes the imagery; nothing is left out or fogged over, nothing lies idle. The Sixth Satire, for instance, starts off just the way a lilting tirade *pour écraser la femme* ought to: it reviews the past, and not without hallowed allusions; it gets down to live images. The lines then simply roll darkling down the torrent of man's fate from chastity to the bottomless pit. Juvenal stares hard at his subject, while he surveys the conventional matters learned from Lucilius, Horace, and experience: food, sex, highbrow and lowbrow self-indulgence; climbers of all sorts; men, effeminate men, women, manly women, soldiers, workers, artists, public officials; "whatever men do." And then he hammers away at the targets in lines of lapidary strength:

> *The bed holds more than a bride; you lie with bicker and quarrel*
> *Always, all night long, and sleep is the last thing you get there.*
>
> *Gods must . . . suffer from boredom.*
>
> *No delay's ever too long in the death of a human being.*
>
> *Now we suffer the evils of a long peace. Luxury hatches*
> *Terrors worse than wars, avenging a world beaten down.*

Of course Juvenal is not merely paving roads with his words, but, Amphion-like, attuning the stones to his purpose of building an earthly city, a

[4] THE SATIRES OF JUVENAL, translated by *Rolfe Humphries*. Indiana University Press. $3.75.

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fortress for satire. Still, it is not the total structure we appreciate, but the tuneful elements that compose it.

Every scene in Juvenal is a messenger scene, every word a messenger, and there is tragic power in the way the man speaks and the way he utters his lines. This, I believe, goes farther than his whirlwind character sketches, than the garish abandon of his Hogarthian subjects, than the man-eating indignation of a horrified witness of "whatever men do," to impart lasting beauty and memorable accents to his art of poetry. Humphries lets us hear also what Juvenal saith, for these are true sayings and worthy of all men to be received: fantastically moral; by turns angry, tender, benign, hortatory, revolting, intense, bitter; funny, captious, personal, obscene; ironic and unambiguous; sounding brasses, tingling symbols.

The satirist may see fit to *extend* the myth of the ages down to the present *n*th degree of deterioration (XIII.28-30); or to stress the simple existence of conscience (XIII.208-210). But while he knows the habitual character of evil, he shares the formidable conviction of many satirists that the good life also exists:

> *Nature never dictates one thing and Wisdom another*
> *(numquam aliud natura, aliud sapientia dicit)* XIV.321

This last is curiously like the most famous single line in Juvenal to the effect that we can *only* pray for a sound mind in a sound body:

> *orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano* X.356

Which somehow, however often related, always rings true. In still another passage, Juvenal sets poverty to music, with overtones of happiness and freedom:

> *If you are on the road by night, and carrying with you*
> *Only an item or two of your less elaborate silver,*
> *You fear a sword or a club or a reed that stirs in the moonlight.*
> *But your poor man sings a song in the face of the robber.* X.19-22

Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator. In this last line I see a moral, but I also hear a resounding definition of poetry. Juvenal himself strolled down that road, contemptuous, in full view of the thugs, cheerfully singing.

P. S. Line numbers (and titles) in the running heads make the book easy to handle and consult, attractive and workable. (I spotted only two misprints, "Agrippa" for Agrippina, p. 88, and "sodder" for solder, p. 172.) A lengthier introduction—reviewing the political background and difficult biography of Juvenal and touching on his literary associations—notes, and an index, could also play a valuable part. As for sex, Juvenal was not the first man to discover it, but he was the first to put his finger on it and then put his foot down. Humphries' rare vulgarities, e.g. "Elvius," "keep chewing your spearmint," are fully compensated for by his flair for translating obscenities obscenely. As a rule, Humphries' alert diction combines with his inventive rhythm to result in a high-fidelity full frequency range reproduction of *The Satires of Juvenal*.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Art for Whose Sake?[1]

THE QUESTION IS, For whom were these novels written? They must have entertained at least the dozen editors who chose them, and they were obviously—honorably?—produced for the diversion of somebody's leisure time. Tolstoy, however, who believed that art is too important to be given into the charge of triflers, deplored its wilful fabrication for the idle educated, he was even impolite enough to classify such luxury merchandise as counterfeit art, and—sixty years before the Flood—he enumerated and explained the four methods by which it appeals to the appetite of an inert, consumer audience.

"The first method consists in borrowing whole subjects or merely separate features from former works recognized by everyone as being poetic, and in so reshaping them with sundry additions that they should have an appearance of novelty. Such works, evoking in people of a certain class memories of artistic feelings formerly experienced, produce an impression similar to art." Of these dozen novels, four lean most heavily on Method No. 1. All four have "poetic" subjects: *The Hook* is a portentously slender allegory about three officers who must decide whether killing an enemy officer in cold blood is morally different from killing in the heat of battle; *The Mimosa Smokers*, a piece about Europeanized old-family Americans unraveling their not so complex fates at presumably witty New York cocktail parties, the whole lugubrious business taking place in that sort of subliterary echo chamber in which voices are "rich, haunting" and Bach arias "sublimely stirring"; *Every Eye*, a novel written by almost any female English novelist, in which man talk actually goes like this, "by Jove, he ought to be horsewhipped," and women muse, "The pain and the urgency had gone forever. Did nobody love anyone in those days? Was it all an illusion of youth?"; *The Girl Beneath the Lion*, about a lubriciously described young virgin who is so excited by Sardinia and its large, sturdy, overpoweringly fragrant white sea lilies, as well as by the author's ludicrously tendentious images ("And Vanina, when she looked behind her, saw the high, square tower crowned with battlements that marked the site of Santa Lucia by its grandiose red erection in the moonlight"), that she arranges to be first examined in the nude and on the next night deflowered by a young man whom she has never seen before

[1] THE HOOK, by *Vahé Katcha*. Simon and Schuster. $2.50. THE MIMOSA SMOKERS, by *Peter S. Jennison*. Crowell. $3.50. EVERY EYE, by *Isobel English*. Crowell. $3.00. THE GIRL BENEATH THE LION, by *André Pieyre de Mandiargues*. Grove. $1.45. MRS. BRIDGE, by *Evan S. Connell, Jr.* Viking. $3.75. ACROBAT ADMITS, by *Alfred Grossman*. Braziller. $3.50. THE PEARL BASTARD, by *Lilian Hale*. Braziller. $3.00. THE HUSTLER, by *Walter Tevis*. Harper's. $3.50. A MIRROR FOR MAGISTRATES, by *Richard Gibson*. Anthony Blond (London). 12s 6d. THE PISTOL, by *James Jones*. Scribner's. $3.00. HARRY VERNON AT PREP, by *Franc Smith*. Houghton Mifflin. $3.00. THE LAW, by *Roger Vailland*. Knopf. $3.95.

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and whom she leaves forever on the morning after. All four novels are thunderously symbolic and have the same set look of dismal sincerity: the identifying stigmata of current derivative fiction.

Method No. 2, which Tolstoy calls imitation, "consists in describing in minutest detail the external appearance, the faces, the clothes, the gestures, the tones, and the habitations of the characters represented, with all the occurrences met with in life. For instance in novels and stories, when one of the characters speaks we are told in what voice he spoke and what he was doing at the time." No modern novelist, trained on the selectivities of Flaubert, will fall kerplunk into *that* trap, but Evan S. Connell, Jr. lines it with cotton-wool irony and eases his way in. Here are Mrs. Bridge and her daughter discussing a Negro girl who was the daughter's childhood playmate:

> "Does she look the same?"
>
> "Heavens, no! She's almost as tall as Douglas and she looked so black. It's such a shame."
>
> Carolyn became thoughtful, and finally said, "I think I'd like to see her. Which hotel is she working at?"
>
> "I've been trying to think. I knew you'd want to see her. And she told me which one it was."
>
> "Well, it doesn't matter, I guess. I don't know what we could say to each other, it's been so long."
>
> "How many years has it been?"
>
> "Quite a few," Carolyn answered, biting her lip. "It's been quite a few years, Mother."
>
> Mrs. Bridge turned off the gas in the oven and shut the doors.

The truth is in the elaborate ordinariness of the details; irony is merely the latest fashionable envelope of such vicarious self-recognition. Method No. 2 is for those who, having tired of perceiving nothing but clichés in life, turn gratefully to the same clichés under the auspices of art.

"The third method is by action, often purely physical, on the outer senses. Work of this kind is said to be 'striking' and 'effective.' In all arts these effects consist chiefly in contrasts: in bringing together the terrible and the tender, the beautiful and the hideous, the loud and the soft, darkness and light, the most ordinary and the most extraordinary. In verbal art, besides effects of contrast there are also effects consisting in the description of things that have never before been described. These are usually pornographic details evoking sexual desire, or details of suffering and death evoking feelings of horror." *Acrobat Admits*, for instance, depends on grotesque contrasts in style, mood, and incident, collisions in a free-associational vacuum which are never so amusing or so pyrotechnically revelatory as they profess to be, and which conclude with one more outrageous effect, an abrupt and unmotivated murder. In *The Pearl Bastard* a 15-year-old city girl, on a summer visit to the seashore, begins as the victim of a rape and ends as the murderer of her new-born infant; life is a succession of inexplicable unearned horrors, meaningless

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suffering and meaningless death, relieved only by an occasional snack of Hemingway cold cuts:

> The salami tasted good. It was hard and tasty and plenty spicy. The rolls were getting stale and crumbs fell down and stuck to the damp dungarees. It is nice to eat when you are alone and dreaming and no one is watching. Then the stuff goes down easy and tastes good and before you know it it is gone and you are wanting more.

Otherwise, the sea—or is it life?—is misery; so at least says the complacent sequence of tailored mincing sentences:

> I came wanting. I came loving. I came needing. I came hungering and it filled my mouth with sand.

"The fourth method is that of interesting (that is, occupying the mind) in connexion with works of art. . . . For example in a novel, the interest may consist in a description of Egyptian or Roman life, the life of miners, or that of the clerks in a big shop. The reader becomes interested, and mistakes this interest for an artistic impression." It's a good bet you've never got the lowdown on the life and times of an expert pool player who meets the tab by knocking off local talent from the Coast to Chicago; if you haven't, *The Hustler* will while away an evening or two with the glamour of unfamiliarity:

> Eddie beat him, steadily, making shots that no one had ever made before, knifing balls in, playing hairline position, running rack after rack of balls without his cue ball's touching a cushion, firing ball after ball after ball into the center, the heart of every pocket. His stroking arm was like a conscious thing, and the cue stick was a living extension of it. There were nerves in the wood of it, and he could feel the tapping of the leather tip with the nerves, could feel the balls roll; and the exquisite sound that they made as they hit the bottoms of the pockets was a sound both there, on the table, and in the very center of his own soul.

This is Eddie beating Minnesota Fats, the best there is; and if you don't think money can be a work of art too, let Eddie tip you off:

> . . . three thousand dollars. The bills were beautiful with the old magical color; and Eddie, whose senses still seemed so acute that there was nothing that could not be seen by him, responded with sensitivity and depth to the fine impeccable lines of engraving, the sharpness of detail, and the excellent, tasteful numbers in the corners of the bills.

"Then," for Fast Eddie Felson is no fool, "he put the money in his pocket."

The motives of a British publisher in bringing out a badly written novel by an American Negro on the life of a Negro in America are perhaps not altogether above suspicion; still, *A Mirror for Magistrates* begins as the promised documentary—flailing, inept, often sentimental, and always in deadly earnest—on conditions of existence and states of mind

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the exposure of which continues to come as shocking news to most Americans. The trouble is that Mr. Gibson is too angry a man, and too unskillful a writer, to focus on a point beyond the slogans of journalistic dissent:

> Opening one of . . . [the old magazines] . . . he swept his eyes over the many war photos, pictures of Our Boys killing Japanese with flamethrowers on obscure Pacific atolls, or pictures of Our Boys giving candy and chewing-gum to ragged European children. There was a section devoted to the "Home Front" and there Bubba found a photo of three fat Philadelphia cops battering an unpatriotic striker with their riot clubs. Across from that he saw the picture of a Negro being legally led to the electric chair in Mississippi to be legally lynched to safe-guard Western civilization.

And the strangled impotence of rage that settles for such slogans blocks off, at last, even the author's own access to the information that might come as news.

James Jones's *The Pistol* is unlike *From Here to Eternity* in several ways: for one, it is only 158 pages long; for another, it concerns only a single aspect of the life of American soldiers stationed in Hawaii; and finally, it takes place just *after* Pearl Harbor. Then there is a really dreadful book called *Harry Vernon at Prep*, which relates the adventures of a happy-go-lucky card of a car thief who has written a book called *The Student* (*The Outsider?*) and seen through Zen, and who is on his way to take over a teaching job at a New England prep school:

> I stopped the car I was in, and say to the two Cops, "Can I help out?" I say it with a big smile, and flash the Harvard University sticker I have pasted on the windshield, as though they was two constipated ballerinas and I was Degas carrying a box of Ex-lax in my paint kit.

As you see, a card, and one who has no use for what he calls "phonus balonus." Harry's jolly escapade turns out, however, irreverence and all, to be a bit of phonus balonus itself: we learn very little about car thieves or prep schools, and the book is in fact, awesome vulgarity and all, a pitch for the domestic virtues and pleasures of proletarian Boston, especially marriage, as when Harry pauses to observe the scenery while persuading his friend Red the bartender—good fellows both—that Red damn well *can* crack the books to become a high-school or maybe even college teacher:

> "Kit," I say, "would you mind going to tuck in the kids for a minute? I have something I want to say to your husband in private." She was smart enough to do it and no questions asked. We both watched her rear again. I could tell Red was proud to have a friend of his he could trust see it. "Frig you if you don't, Redhead," I said. We looked at each other about two minutes. "Come on back in now, Kit," I call to her. "Red is back on the beam again and going strong." I never saw a guy so pure happy.

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Since by far the most skillful and most entertaining of these dozen novels is Roger Vailland's *The Law*, to point out that it too is "interesting" chiefly in the stern Tolstoyan sense of the word may appear ungenerous. Yet the novel holds attention largely by its show of intimate familiarity with the life of the small Italian port that is its setting. The impressive skill is in the disposition of (to us) unfamiliar facts, Method No. 4; the entertainment is—merely entertainment, back to Tolstoy's Method No. 1, diversion at the manipulating through stock episodes of a prodigious variety of figures which, if they are not already stock, become so at the moment of being contrived: the brutal, courageous town boss; the sardonic, roughly just ladies' man of a police chief (played by Claude Rains, as in *Casablanca*); the beautiful cold wife made suddenly warm by illicit passion; the weak-willed handsome son of the brutal, courageous town boss; the shrewd, fierce peasant maiden, more than a match for the brutal, courageous town boss; the prostitute who can bring men to driveling subjection by fifteen minutes of (unspecified) maneuvers; and—the give-away—the patriarchal aristocratic old libertine who, in his passion for hunting, women, and heroic kingship as well as in his scorn for priests and dictators, is supposed to be the humanistic soul of the novel, but who is evoked only as a grandiose hollowness of tight-lipped sentiment:

> He said aloud:
>
> "*Così sia*, so be it."
>
> By these words he did not mean to proclaim his submission to the divine law, as Christians did, or to a biological or social or personal law, as did the faithful of all kinds of sects. He was testifying on his own behalf. It had been so. He regretted nothing; he was ashamed of nothing; he wanted nothing; he was acknowledging himself, he was proclaiming himself (to himself) as he had been and as he remained in the hour of death. That was what he meant by saying: "So be it."
>
> "*Così sia*," replied Marietta.
>
> She thought she was replying as a Christian to a Christian's prayer in the hour of death. But fundamentally she was so pagan that the sense she gave to her *amen* was not (although she could not formulate this to herself) so very different from the sense which Don Cesare gave to his.
>
> Several times in his lifetime, a man of quality was called upon to make war. This had been so in every period of history. The rest of the time, he kept his distance. Don Cesare had certainly made war and had certainly kept his distance . . .

and so on and on, pages of posturing self-pity (under the eye of the beautiful peasant girl) in the guise of heroic stoicism.

All right, then, one is grateful for anything at all. Even James Jones's belief in the primitive code of the pre-war army—a code of tough-and-tender, cross-your-heart-and-hope-to-die, somewhat more simple-minded than Hemingway's—is touchingly personal after so much unloving fabrication (and seven of these novels are *first* novels, in which, one would

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hope, the novice's affection for his first subject would go far toward making up for his lack of skill): *The Pistol* has a sustained cunning innocence, as of the backward child who can be destructively nasty but who for the afternoon is playing at Scout's honor. Mr. Connell is not just the supercilious chronicler as, in an interlude between the thudding sophisticated platitudes that bury poor Mrs. Bridge, he presents an impervious, magniloquent maid whose vitality is not wholly New-Yorkerish or patronized:

> When Harriet, who was at times inclined to insubordination, brought in the breakfast tray Mrs. Bridge exclaimed, "For Heaven's sake! What on earth happened to you?"
>
> "Couperin," said Harriet, grinning.
>
> "Oh, goodness! Is he the one with the motorcycle?"
>
> "No, ma'am," said Harriet vehemently. "I took my last ride on a motorcycle, believe me. Approximately eight or ten weeks back." She began to feel tenderly about her jaw, on which there was a large purple bruise.
>
> "I certainly hope this was an accident," said Mrs. Bridge.
>
> "It came about," Harriet replied with regal poise, "because only last evening it so happened that I and that Couperin had a grave dispute. Couperin, he got the worst."
>
> The evidence seemed to indicate Couperin had spoken the final word, but Mrs. Bridge decided not to get involved.
>
> "What does he do?" she inquired, to change the subject.
>
> "He is associated with the collection bureau of this city."
>
> "Tax collectors, or—"
>
> "Bureau of rubbish and trash. Then, too, he plumbs a bit. When he is inclined."

The Hustler does after all come alive, sporadically, with a sense of Eddie Felson's professional pride, of his dignity as a man who owes nothing and demands nothing, who lives in the exercise of his talent. And *Acrobat Admits*, the most perverse and in many ways the most promising of the dozen, arrives, ultimately, at the definition of a man's despair for the hopelessly troubled woman he loves:

> "Hugo, I'm not happy," she said.
>
> "I know."
>
> "But I want to be. Honestly I do."
>
> "Now are we trying to make me feel guilty for not making you be happy?" I said. I couldn't help that. I didn't believe it.
>
> "I'm not doing that now. You make me feel better than anyone else does. I'm sorry again."
>
> "Yes. I know."
>
> "But I'm not happy. Why can't I be?"
>
> Any other time I probably would have been therapeutic and lied. I told the truth, now. Not that being therapeutic did any good or made any difference. "Why should you be? Why the hell should you be?

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Have you got a paper from the authorities promising you anything? Did the doctor give you a guarantee before he plucked you out? Did your parents furnish you a contract before they made you? You're an accident, like anybody else is an accident. Accidents don't have any rights. . . "

A reviewer may sourly complain that he has the right to expect more, if not better, from 2500 pages of current fiction. And if he does not get it, whose fault? "The art of the rich classes [read, in our time, 'the idle educated'] . . . arises," says Tolstoy, "not from the artist's inner impulse but chiefly because people of the upper classes demand amusement and pay well for it. They demand from art the transmission of feelings that please them, and this demand artists try to meet. But it is a very difficult task, for people of the wealthy classes, spending their lives in idleness and luxury, desire to be continually diverted by art; and art, even the lowest, cannot be produced at will, but has to generate spontaneously in the artist's inner self. And therefore to satisfy the demands of people of the upper classes [read, in our time, 'every American citizen of voting age'] artists have had to devise methods of producing imitations of art."

It is still rather unsettling to encounter novels like *The Pearl Bastard* and *Harry Vernon at Prep*, which exhibit incompetent writing down to the level of the phrase and sentence, incapacity to conceive a character or to carry on even a stereotype with consistency or mere recognizability, incapacity to imagine and develop a plausible human situation, incapacity to transmit a single unborrowed feeling; or a novel like *The Mimosa Smokers*, which to all these defects adds a bumbling gape-mouthed solemnity. But we must accustom ourselves. These dozen novels are no worse, and they are for the most part less pretentious, than, say, *Playhouse 90:* as commercial entertainment assimilates the methods—Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 through 90—of counterfeit "serious" art, so counterfeit art becomes more and more indistinguishable from commercial entertainment. And as the American audience becomes one vast and uniform appetite for diversion, for the drawing and quartering of time, the definitive skills and curiosities of the artist have less and less commercial and social reason to survive.

"Art," says Tolstoy, "is not a pleasure, a solace, or an amusement; art is a great matter. Art is an organ of human life transmitting man's reasonable perception into feeling." This is a severe and modest statement to start from; it is also a cheering statement, because it assumes—what we must all hopefully assume—that art continues to have, at least, every human and personal reason to survive.

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NORMAN N. HOLLAND

Agee on Film: Reviewer Re-Viewed

THOSE FEW SOULS who have been hardy enough to doubt the legend that the late James Agee was the *ne plus ultra* of film reviewing will find belated comfort in this collection of Agee's actual criticism.[1] He was witty, intelligent, and overpoweringly sincere, but, with only a handful of exceptions, his reviews say no more than run-of-the-mill newspaper commentaries.

Even so, this collection does not do Agee justice. It opens with his piece for *Life* on silent comedy, "Comedy's Greatest Era," his best-known, but by no means his best, criticism. From there, the book plunges mercilessly into one hundred forty or so columns for *The Nation* from 1943 to 1948, dealing with three or four hundred movies, almost none of which anyone would remember were it not for occasional flickering resurrections on late TV. The book breaks this cascade of reviewed celluloid with a piece on John Huston, and then we go through the whole business again with about forty reviews from *Time* (1941-1948). Readers will gasp, tire as they meet again liberalmag *Nation's* reviews now translated into Lucetalk, edited to fit rightwing *Life-Time* party line. The collection stutters to a close with a review of *Sunset Boulevard* for *Sight and Sound* and a soul-searcher for the *Partisan*.

For the most part, Agee operates strictly at the level of gut reaction: I liked or I didn't like. This is perforce the S.O.P. of any reviewer with a large public for the simple reason that the average moviegoer just wants to hear a half-dozen neighbors, cronies, or critics advise him whether or not he should go see the picture. Much as the public may wish this purely normative criticism, however, it is ultimately of no more permanent value than two ten-year-olds' debate on the merits of rival bubble gums, for there is little or nothing in it verifiable beyond the feeling in the critic's own tummy. It is, of course, possible to give both a normative judgment *and* some analysis of the film itself, but Agee rarely did. As a result, about the only way of rating his visceral criticism is to see how many people have since agreed. On this basis, Agee's record is fair. He panned with varying degrees of faint praise some films critics still consider first-rate: Mark Hellinger's *The Killers*, for example, and even more surprisingly, Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise*. On the other hand, Agee panned with equally faint praise a variety of pictures much touted when they first appeared but, now that the dust of advertising has settled down, no longer regarded as all-time greats: Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* and *Spellbound*, Billy Wilder's *Lost Weekend*, Louis de Rochemont's *House on 92d Street*, René Clair and Dudley Nichol's *And Then There Were None*.

Actually, Agee has criteria behind his visceral reactions, and, though

[1] AGEE ON FILM. McDowell, Obolensky. $6.00.

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the anonymous editors of this collection evidently didn't want to let us in on them, we can ferret out three closely-linked values: realism, honesty, and what Agee calls the "one rule for movies that I finally care about: that the film interest the eyes, and do its job through the eyes" (p. 305). Hence, Agee tends (like most critics of today) to overrate the silent era by confusing final artistic merit with the mere invention of visual techniques (for example, in a wretched film like Griffith's *Intolerance*). Hence, too, Agee tends to be utterly oblivious to the verbal images and symbols which, in recent years, the immobility of the wide-screen cameras have made so important.

As part of visual appeal, Agee insists on realism; the film's business, he says, is to show "what happens inside real and particular people among real and particular objects—not with how a generalized face can suggest a generalized emotion in a generalized light" (p. 118). This plausible view actually limits Agee radically: it totally rules out films that work allegorically, Westerns, melodramas, horror or science-fiction films, or, to put it bluntly, most movies. Also totally lost on Agee is the delightful spivvery of such entertainments as *Casablanca*, *To Have and Have Not*, *Dead of Night*, or *The Raven*. Yet he goes all giggly for any old semi-documentary based on real incidents, shot in a real locale, or created by non-professionals.

When Agee calls for realism, he really means honesty. This confusion makes his aesthetic vocabulary oddly ethical. Chaplin, for example, he beatly calls a "saint." Bad films are not just bad, but "degenerate" or "easy" or "false"; they are made by "moral cowards." Good pictures have "purity," "innocence," "directness," or "tenderness." They are "sensitive," "selfless," or "earnest." They have "faith in and love for people." Good pictures are above all—and he uses the word fully as often as any huckster out of Hawley or Wakeman—"sincere." In the hands of a practitioner less skilled than Agee this kind of *Reader's Digest* jargon becomes an especially obnoxious kind of fakery. For Agee, however, as for so many contemporary liberals this moral *hauteur* proved a good thing; it was, no doubt, what endeared him so to the ritually irritated readers of *The Nation*. Virtually every one of his *Nation* columns involves a sort of ethical fidget, a careful rustling up of the reviewer's feathers before clucking at the week's villainies. Read once a week, this kind of thing no doubt seemed a bracing tonic; read in a barrage of one hundred forty columns, as here, I found it intolerably finicky, a calisthenic straining at gnats.

Yet Agee was an honorable man. His emphasis on sincerity and realism represents a profound and moving (if somewhat naive) faith in just plain people and things. "Scrupulously handled," he wrote, "the camera can do what nothing else in the world can do: can record unaltered reality; and can be made also to perceive, record, and communicate, in full unaltered power, the peculiar kinds of poetic vitality which blaze in every real thing and which are in great degree, inevitably and properly, lost to every other kind of artist except the camera artist" (p. 296). Nowhere do these two aims, realism and the poetry of the real, come across more triumphantly than in the films for which Agee wrote scripts: in *The*

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African Queen (directed by Huston) and even more in *The Night of the Hunter* (directed by Charles Laughton), a beautiful and brilliant film almost completely ignored by critics. In it, two children pass through the hatred of the real proclaimed by a sadistic, psychopathic preacher (Robert Mitchum) committed to a wrathful Old Testament God to the love of the real taught by their almost cosmically loving and bounteous foster-mother (Lillian Gish). The film is realistic, but it goes far beyond realism to set out the poetry of life in terms of the abstractness of man, the frailty of woman, and the innocence of children.

Agee's films transcend simple realism, but few of his reviews do. In those few, however, Agee achieves what seems to me to be the real function of the critic, not mere opining, not using the film as an ethical diving-board, but opening the reader's eyes to things in films he might not otherwise see. Agee's best piece is the three-part review of Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*, in which he brings together the themes and techniques of the film—the Responsible Man caught between means and ends. So, too, he brings out of Georges Rouquier's *Farrebique* the movie's central metaphor, the image of life in the cycle of the seed, and, in the case of David Lean's *Great Expectations*, he shows the subtle mingling of fairy tale and social document. These reviews help one see the film whole—no critic can do more.

Yet only these three of Agee's reviews reach this higher level of criticism. Even when he is wildly enthusiastic about a film, say, de Sica's *Shoeshine* or Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* and *Zéro de Conduite*, his review remains mere encomium, often naive at that. In the case of Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, he settles for the notion that this is a picture "about gold and its effects on those who seek it." Whatever that difficult film is about, it is more than gold. Similarly, though he praises Laurence Olivier's use of flat, tapestry-like backgrounds in *Henry V*, he fails to go the next step and show how they bring out the central motif of the picture, the stage on which the public man acts. He manages the startlingly neat trick of reviewing Olivier's *Hamlet* without once mentioning Freud, and in both these pictures he assumes that Olivier has "improved" Shakespeare. In his famous essay for *Life* on silent comedy, Agee speaks eloquently of the styles of Lloyd, Langdon, Keaton, and Chaplin, but he fails to make the basic critical point (which Erwin Panofsky brought out two years before) that the essence of silent comedy was the dialectic between Everyman and his Machines (among them, the camera itself).

In short, Agee's reviews are not what they have been cracked up to be. Far too often the film as film tends to vanish like loot in the melodramatic dust stirred up between the villainy of the manufacturer and the shot-from-the-hip honesty of the critic. Agee's condemnations of hundreds of deservedly forgotten movies are witty, yes, but they should have been edited into more general topics: comedy, realism, acting, and the like. In the present book, these broader topics don't even appear in what purports to be a general index. At least the editors should have provided an introduction which spelled out Agee's basic assumptions about movies, present-

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ly buried in one or two obscure reviews; then Agee's very real sincerity would have seemed more reasonable and less scoutmasterish. In any case, the collection faces one insuperable obstacle: Agee was a film artist more than a film critic; and artist Agee's creative aims interfered with critic Agee's understanding the art of others. As a result, you will have to prowl around on late TV for *The Night of the Hunter* to see the real achievement of Agee on film.

COMMUNICATIONS

Literature and Belief Again

Dear Sirs,

Because Mr. George Elliott is a personal friend of mine, I won't waste your time or insult your readers' sensibilities by canvassing all the nice things that could be said about his article on Dante.[1] These academic bows, nods, becks, compliments, and gestures can be saved for those who need them. I'd like to pick a bone or two with Mr. Elliott—my object being to provide spiritual nutriment for us both, if possible.

The preliminary of what I've got to say against Mr. Elliott's article is that he's perfectly free to see all the mystical visions he likes; he is *not* free to announce publicly that this experience is "higher" than any other experience, because he cannot show that it is not artificially induced, and I can show that the value assigned to it is purely arbitrary. On his own level, I can answer him by saying that his vision is nothing like as high as the vision I get by reading the Koran, or eating peyote; then communication is at an end. The cat and the rat simply don't have the same idea of fun. Coteries flourish when simple preference is generalized into categorical assertion; it's a dangerous verbal habit at best. Thirteen rascals get together and decide they know a language called "Mexican," in which otherwise unspeakable concepts can be exchanged. How can I, with my coarse, literal mind and my everyday English, expose them for what they are—thirteen rascals? We have some obligation to keep speech within the limits of the speakable.

Bringing things down to this level, I wish Elliott had said more explicitly than he did that for Dante the structure of the world is itself a metaphor of God's will. (Things are the words of God.) That way, he wouldn't have implied that the highest way to take Dante is to take him literally. The literal faith, which is the hardest for us to give, came rather easily, in Dante's time, for a variety of reasons; whereas imaginative belief came rather harder. (Why don't we call these, from now on, referential and structural belief?) Elliott, by a supreme effort, gets to accept the vision Dante says he saw, as a literal, referential fact. He's paying Dante

[1] "Getting to Dante," by George P. Elliott. *The Hudson Review*, XI (Winter 1958-59), 597-611.

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the highest compliment a modern man can pay; but he is like praising a stained-glass window for having certain qualities of opacity.

Still, it's clear that Dante did think some of the things he described in the *Commedia* were literally true, though he took the word "literally" in a very different sense than we do, and assigned to "literal truth" a very different role and position among the stages of cognition than we do. The question now is whether it's necessary, to appreciate the poem fully, to accept the poem in any sort of literal sense which is available to us. Well, clearly, the joker in this deck is "fully." There is no such thing as full perception of any sizable work of art. You can see "Guernica" as a whole only from a distance which renders the details indistinct. Dante's poem, which is like a 3-dimensional game of chess, or a series of designs on recessed, super-imposed panes of glass, presents an even harder problem of focus. You cannot see the design on No. 3 without separating it from No. 1, No. 2, and No. 4, and so doing violence to the whole. Add to this that history has exchanged Dante's No. 1 with his No. 4, making the literal level seem ultimate and the ultimate levels fairly easy, and you've got a problem which can only be solved by compromise. Where to compromise?

Now the level on which Elliott thinks it necessary to read Dante is one on which we don't expect to read most literature. The *Aeneid*, *Oedipus Rex*, the novels of Kafka don't raise problems of literal belief. Either the story is avowedly mythical (perhaps avowedly and deliberately untrue) or we never bother about it one way or the other. Suspension of disbelief—it's a hack formula, but it covers a multitude of literary situations, from *The Scarlet Pimpernel* to the first chapter of Genesis, which Longinus admired so much. It is plain that if we read one book—say the Koran—as literally and ultimately true (I distinguish the adverbs), we are unlikely to think certain competing books of the same class to be also true in the same sense—like the Book of Mormon. So in this sense no Mormon can "fully" appreciate the Koran; and if one follows this curious but not altogether outgrown notion to its conclusion, one finds that no Tory can really appreciate Milton, and only a Theosophist gets to first base with Yeats.

This is clearly carrying prosaic (I won't say "logical") consistency to an absurd conclusion, and Elliott specifically disclaims it. But (1) I don't see how he can make a general distinction or even indicate a defensible categorical preference as between structural and referential belief, and (2) I think him likely to do literature irreparable harm by muddling it with religion. The harm he's likely to do religion by muddling it with literature I leave other people to protest.

On the first point, Elliott is pretty specific that Dante looked into the afterlife and saw Heaven and Hell there because "God had constructed things that way." I suppose he saw Purgatory for the same reason. But lots of Protestants have looked into the matter, and report that the Lord did no such thing. Isn't it perfectly clear that Dante saw Purgatory because he felt he ought to see Purgatory, and Milton didn't because he felt he shouldn't? Frankly, I find Elliott badly muddled here. He tells us Dante meant us to take his journey as "possible"; but this is the same suspension

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of disbelief I bring to a reading of Ray Bradbury. Then he tells me some people take the story literally. I think they are very great shnooks if they do; but does he possibly mean to imply that the more literally you can read Dante, the better? If so, he's wasting his time reading Dante; saints' lives are ten times sillier and more preposterous, and hence provide a better test of one's faith. Of course Dante, being a reasonable as well as a reverent man, didn't try to read even the Word of God literally throughout. I simply don't see any advantage proportionate to the troubles involved, in putting Dante's poem to a test which it obviously wasn't designed to meet, and which changed circumstances have rendered more rigorous than Dante could ever have conceived.

Personally, I don't know whether there are a heaven, a hell, and a purgatory. (If there are, "Well, I'll be damned.") But I am quite sure that there is no better way to destroy Dante's poem than to read through it discriminating places where a literal meaning is necessary from places where it's possible from places where it's intended from places where it's silly, and so on ad infinitum. It's even worse to force yourself to take as much of the poem as you can in a literal sense. The literal sense exists in the poem to be noted and forgotten; when it doesn't exist or demands an effort of the conscious will, the best thing is to forget it directly.

Well, but Elliott will settle for the sense of sin. This you've got to have if you're going to get anything at all out of the poem; and here (for the first time) we get a definition. I've been reading Dante with great pleasure for a great many years now, and I have no more sense of sin (as defined by G.P.E., *H. R.*, XI, No. 4, 609) than I have Tantric Samsara—and that's not much. Elliott says sin is there whether I know it or not, but pooh! he's begging the question and changing it at the same time. I'm breaking someone's divine, eternal law (i.e., sinning) every time I swat a fly or fail to practice mother-in-law-avoidance. But I have no *sense of* sin, and I don't think if I did it would help me to read Dante. Indeed, suppose that in encountering Brunetto Latini one were led to think on one's long and disreputable career as a sodomist; or that Ciacco made one furiously to regret that extra helping of roast-beef the other day. It's true that in one sense this extraneous reflection is fulfilling the poem; but in another sense, it's contaminating it (perhaps even more if one doesn't have a career in sodomy to regret, than if one does). A good literary imagination without a sense of sin will enable one to read Dante far better than a sense of sin without literary imagination; indeed, it's unlikely that one can have a good literary imagination without knowing what a sense of sin feels like. But as for feeling personally guilty of violating an eternal order—I don't see the necessity.

Fact is, I don't like this solemn categorical business of saying sloth is worse than adultery and so on. There are times when sloth is lots of fun and not only harmless but entertaining and good form; there are times when adultery is the worst form of cruelty, and other times when it's as innocent a diversion as an extra beer when you're thirsty. Circumstances govern cases in the world I live in; and the reason is, that it's a hard

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enough world to live in if you make it up as you go along. Principles are not only arbitrary, they're extravagant. The problem is not just cultural relativism. Conceding that I don't (verbally) and do (really) know what injustice is, we are all stewing in massive injustice 24 hours a day, and quite properly neglecting 99.999999 per cent of it. Who is really his brother's keeper? Who knows who his brother is and whether his brother wants to be kept? Look, we aren't an agrarian community; we aren't a city state; there aren't any philosopher-kings in this man's town. General rules and moral principles will drive you crazy. What I try to substitute for a sense of sin is a sense of style; any report will have to be strictly interim, but for the moment I find it a perfectly wonderful substitute.

This doesn't mean, naturally (to return to Dante), that all I'm interested in is the way he puts words together. It means I admire his deportment, his control, his involvement, his perspective, the vision of order. I think it would be lovely to have such a vision, and actually I have had remote analogies to the Catholic vision (they were Marxist). I don't have them now; yet I can see such visions as ideas of order, and rejoice in them as I rejoice in the architectural fantasies of Piranesi, without ever asking myself whether they exist or could possibly exist. (When you look at Picasso, do you ask yourself whether the object represented there could referentially exist?) In this sense, it may be true, I don't get full enjoyment from Dante; it's also true that a full-enjoyer-of-Dante couldn't get full enjoyment out of Shakespeare. But Shakespeare, by contrast with Dante, is an intensely modern man. Obviously I don't mean that he believed in democracy or togetherness or even Bergson. I mean simply that he had a modern man's concept of the self as a slippery, complex and infinitely mutable thing, whereas for Dante it was rigid and solid. (To recapture even partially Dante's notion of the self, one would have to perform a violent imaginative debowelling of European history.) Similarly, for Shakespeare Christian religion was not a monolithic structure, solid all the way through, but often served as a fairly transparent metaphor for something else. (Has it been said that Shakespeare, though evidently a Protestant, an Anglican, a believer in hierarchy, a believer in the church, the sort of man who could have supported Hooker's Book V to the letter, was not in fact a Christian?) So one can adjust to whatever vision of order rises out of Shakespeare, as one cannot to Dante, with relatively little sacrifice of those perceptions which are peculiar to us as modern people.

But I won't try to take issue on the easy ground that Shakespeare is more accessible than Dante, therefore better (though if we go to talking about the "highest" form of experience, I wouldn't in the least mind comparing *Lear* with the *Paradiso*). But simply in reading Dante, I think it wrong-headed to read him as Mr. Elliott proposes, with the intention of finding in the poem a moral order to simplify modern problems. Reading Dante my way doesn't render life simpler, it makes life more complex. His vision of order moves me to think of an intellectual order, analogous to his, but built out of materials which are indefeasibly mine. Being a

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modern man, I can see that the categories which were liberty for him would be anguish and constriction for me. The architecture is magnificent in itself; but I no more try to live in that style than I exorcise devils from my Chevvy when it stalls.

Clearly, there's something hoked-up about the idea that by exercising our little literary imaginations, we can be in sympathy (immediate and active sympathy) with any given author in a matter of minutes. There are some people I don't want to be in sympathy with. There are combinations of people which, as combinations, are absolutely indigestible. The real question is, how close can you get to Dante without making such special commitments as cut you off from other experiences which are (1) extensive, (2) inevitable and (3) intimate. As I see the matter, anyone can have the mystical vision if he sets himself to it. Essentially, it's a matter of narrowing and concentrating, and it doesn't much matter what you narrow and concentrate on, your navel is as good as anything. This is one of the accomplishments that make the middle ages so interesting. But they were a fascinating mistake in human history; the most marvelous cul-de-sac the human race ever ran its collective nose into. Even if a man shoves his nose back in there, and tells me it's the highest experience there is, I can still see his rump waggling around in the second half of the 20th century. And in this our world (if there's no one mystic vision), there's a sense of creative process, which is the highest thing *I* know. If you put your mind to it, it has most of the womb-satisfactions of mystical vision, plus some free-wheeling ones of its own. And it still leaves you with people, with sensitivities, awarenesses, and responsibilities which, once you've felt them, can only be cauterized out of the human conscience with wilful stupidity or a hot iron.

While I'm in the lay-sermon vein, let me add that a first premise of my whole argument is that one does not neglect or suppress the light wherever it shows itself. One tries to make oneself as capacious and harmonious a vessel for receiving it, as may be. (Capacity and harmony, my ultimate intellectual virtues, are virtues strictly in that order.) The mystical vision as I've observed it in action displaces far more often than it extends the ordinary range of vision. Light limits light. *Le meilleur c'est l'ennemi du bien*, say the French. For a little bitty bit of foggy, private *meilleur*, the mystics I've known have sacrificed an immense lot of genuine communicable *bien*.

In the end, there's a kind of rigidity and inhumanity about saying "sloth is worse than adultery"—under all circumstances, in whatever combinations, for whatever reasons, regardless of the other people involved, just because Yahweh is said to have said so. As a matter of taste, I don't like it—it's worse than immoral (denial of the light), it's portentous. As the lady said in the 18th century (and I understand just what she meant), "things have come to a pretty pass when religion starts interfering with a person's private life." I include literature very much in my private as well as my public life. And in this matter of reading Dante, where the resources of my literary imagination are already taxed to the

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utmost, the sort of rigidity which Mr. Elliott has worked himself into thinking desirable, would in fact be disastrous. When we submit ourselves to the poem, trying to receive its poetic meanings as capaciously as we can, worrying only secondarily about secondary harmonies, and not heeding at all the extra-literary ones, we are doing all right. Or so I think.

ROBERT M. ADAMS

Ithaca, N. Y.

Dear Sirs,

A Jivaro is by no means reprehensible for eating the heart of the foe he spears at twenty paces, but it would be bad for Mr. Adams and me, who are skilled at hurling words at 200 miles, to emulate the head-shrinker: he doesn't know what he's doing but we would. All the same, it's worse to eat your combatant than it is to dispute with him.

By this inordinate instance, I mean to indicate that I rejoice to concur with all reasonable men, not excluding Mr. A., in believing that contingency is of the essence in judging any particular moral act, whatever your ethical system or vague beliefs or cultural patterns. Of course any act is as act morally neutral. Take a kiss: compare Judas' kiss in the New Testament with the Christ's of *The Grand Inquisitor* with dying Antony's in Cleopatra's arms. Still, as a general thing it's worse to kill a man than it is to kiss him. No? I also mean by the example that I believe the American code of conduct is superior to the Jivaran, if only because it is more civilized. Our code, for example, makes it possible for any one person to possess incomparably more of such high virtues as capacity and harmony than does theirs; and our code also extends the possibilities of vice. (As for Dante's code, his hell was rich with bishops.)

So far, I hope, Adams and I agree. Furthermore, I agree with him that *Lear* is up to the *Paradiso*; that a code of blue laws rigidly applied is constrictive and anguishing, as well as being impossible for us now to accept; that the mystical vision (of which I have had only the most obscure experience and that but once) can be appallingly exclusive, whereas the sense of creative process (which I have often experienced) can be marvelously expansive and harmonious; and that, for the purpose of reading the *Commedia* esthetically, one need not heed its extra-literary meanings. All the same, I think that Dante's moral order is superior to, say, Aristotle's just as Einstein's physical order is superior to Aristotle's; no one of these three saw a whole order exactly as it is, nor is any one of them to be considered, as a man, superior to either of the others; yet I believe that Dante was closer to one kind of truth than were the other two men, as Einstein was to another kind. Further, I believe that the moral order which Dante saw and re-created, like the physical order which Einstein saw and re-created, surpasses any order I have power either to see or create: their creative acts were enormous and marvelous,

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and the truths they approximated were *the* truths. The highest thing I know, whether spiritual or scientific, I believe to be less than the highest thing there is.

As for *why* I hold these non-Adams beliefs, and those other pre-Adams beliefs on sin, I will not try to say much, largely because I think this issue tangential to our real argument but also because I'm a terrible theologian. (Adams' communication illustrates the maxim that things about which we endlessly dispute are things about which there is no disputing; that is, as a preliminary he denies me the right to announce publicly my belief that the mystical vision is higher than any other experience, yet I was gratified to see that later on he undeniably asserts his belief that the creative process is the highest thing *he* knows.) Roughly, I have come to accept most of Dante's referential beliefs on sin, as expounded in the *Commedia* (expounded, not structured into it), because this is the best way I know of to think about some of my most important experiences, even better than the psychoanalytical way, which I have also found profoundly helpful; and I'm not talking about fly-swatting or mother-in-law-avoidance; I'm talking about those obscure, pervasive, sinful perversions and excesses and defects of love which I find in myself arranged just about as Dante in his poem describes them as being arranged in all men, in the nature of things. Furthermore, I am so very old-fashioned that, when I read a writer who impresses me as deeply as Dante (or Homer, say, or Dostoievsky), I am disposed to look favorably at that writer's referential beliefs just because that great man held them seriously. But the heart-reason I hold my beliefs, the reason they can be called beliefs at all, the no-reason, is just that I believe them. This has to do with faith, which is no more a matter of preference than the mystical vision is a matter of navel-concentration, as Robert Martin Adams damned well knows. And why, when I'm talking about the matter of the *Divine Comedy*, should I have to remain within the limits of the speakable if Dante couldn't? One of the great things about Dante is that he pushes you to your ultimate position, which is apt to be outside the limits of the speakable.

But the focus of disagreement between Adams and me is whether it helps the reader of a religious poem to have religion in him. Well, I won't stick for a *full* reading; Adams is right, there is no such thing. That term indicates something rather hard to pin down. A *better* reading, perhaps?—something unspeakable like that. And of course I don't go through the poem rigidly categorizing as I read, any more than Adams goes through it muttering to himself: "Here's something to worry about only secondarily and here's something I don't have to heed, but ah! here's a poetic meaning I should try to receive capaciously." I do not believe a bit more than he does that after I die my soul (if I'm lucky) will sail to a seven-ledged mountain off the east coast of Australia, antipodal to Jerusalem; and while I'm in process of enjoying the poem, I can suspend this disbelief with scarcely any effort, nor do I mark time as though the *Purgatorio* were a charming fantasy with a moral tacked on at the end. But I am sure that my general agreement with Dante's moral beliefs

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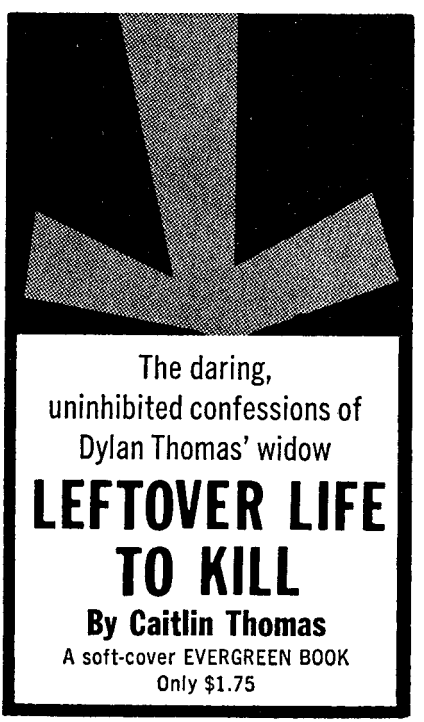
enhances my enjoyment of the poem, both my literary and non-literary enjoyment if such a distinction means anything. The reason I am sure of this is that, when I used to disagree with him, I liked his poem less than I do now. Extra-literary; extra-esthetic; all mixed up: human.

Suppose *Lear* and the *Paradiso* to be esthetically on a par: of course *Lear* affects me the more. How could it be otherwise? My non-literary experience is far more like Shakespeare's than like Dante's; I can cry out against the outrageousness of being injured by laws which I badly comprehend, far more easily and fully than I can rejoice in the contemplation of God's order apart from my mortal experience. My experience and my referential belief are not necessarily harmonious (e.g., so far as I can see, the earth is flat). Not only that, for enjoying a poem it is more important for my experience than for my beliefs to jibe with the author's. But it seems to me gross perversity to maintain that (other things being equal) one can discard a heavy cargo of extra-literary meanings from a poem whose author announces these meanings to be the purpose of the poem and who structured the poem on these beliefs, and for this reader yet to maintain that he is able to read it as well as he could if he incorporated all these meanings, or even some of them.

A word on sin. Adams' example of injustice is, I think, the best possible one. Just because we are and know we are stewing in massive injustice 24 hours a day, and neglecting it, all of us Americans severally and collectively are paying a brutal penalty; our guilt and anxiety from this alone



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(to say nothing of our ways of waging war) help to degrade us, to make us lie and lie that our comfort is of more than body and that our wealth is a sign of our worth, to make tickling ourselves one of our major industries, to drive us crazy indeed. Maybe Adams can get away with substituting a sense of style for a sense of sin, and I wish him well and await his interim report (which I hope to get in words at seven paces); but for us shnooks, for me, more stringent remedies are needed. These remedies should be social in form but there must be something essentially religious about them if they are to purge us, each of us and all of us. Oh yes—if religion doesn't start interfering with a person's private life, it's nowhere; the tasteful nowhere where Adams and the 18th-century lady of his acquaintance want it.

But take *King Oedipus*, which is saturated with religion and a sense of sin. (I find it inscrutable that Adams should charge *me* with introducing religion into literature.) It has made its way long and well, as I believe, in good part because the world—not only Sophocles' world but *the* world—is just as outrageously put together as Sophocles implies in the play: an act a man commits in total ignorance of its sinfulness may so spread damage about that when he discovers what he has done he must be bitterly injured and can find forgiveness, if he finds it at all, only after and through great suffering. In addition to all the esthetic reasons, men have admired the play because what Sophocles says about the nature of things, religious, moral, psychological, corresponds profoundly with what they feel and fear and guess things to be like; furthermore, the stance Sophocles takes towards the world, while it is unlike Dante's in most respects, is like it in that it is steady, ample, and unifying. It is a possible stance. "(Dante's) vision of order moves me to think of an intellectual order, analogous to his, but built out of materials which are indefeasibly mine"—that too is possible. But "I make the world up as I go along"—that stance is intolerable, no stance at all, a jig; yet it is what Mr. Adams, as a modern man, says he tries for; nor is he alone in this preposterous superHumean endeavor.

But who's so happy about being modern? The social, technological, traditional, conventional, religious disorders and schisms and interruptions and alarms of our age have been so great that we are immured in a nihilism that makes strangers of us all; one of the ways to get through the age is to extemporize a world from day to day, but surely there is a solid, enduring, perhaps antique alternative to be attempted. Must being modern cripple us so badly that we cannot even try to benefit from the (non-literary) teachings of great writers? And surely one of the things they teach is that the moral universe, like the physical, was already made up for us to see and re-create—why, God knows; how, Dante can help us understand in part. Myself, I'm having enough trouble making up this epistle as I go along without taking on everything else.

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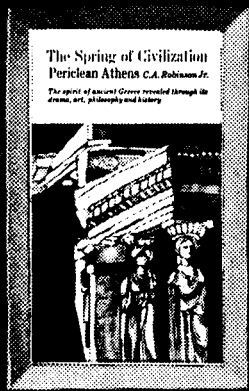

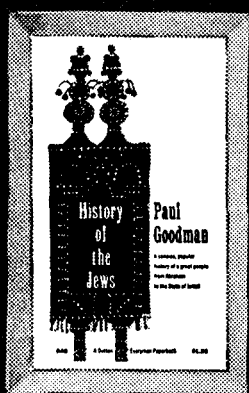

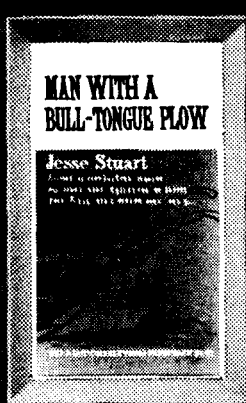

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